MARVEL

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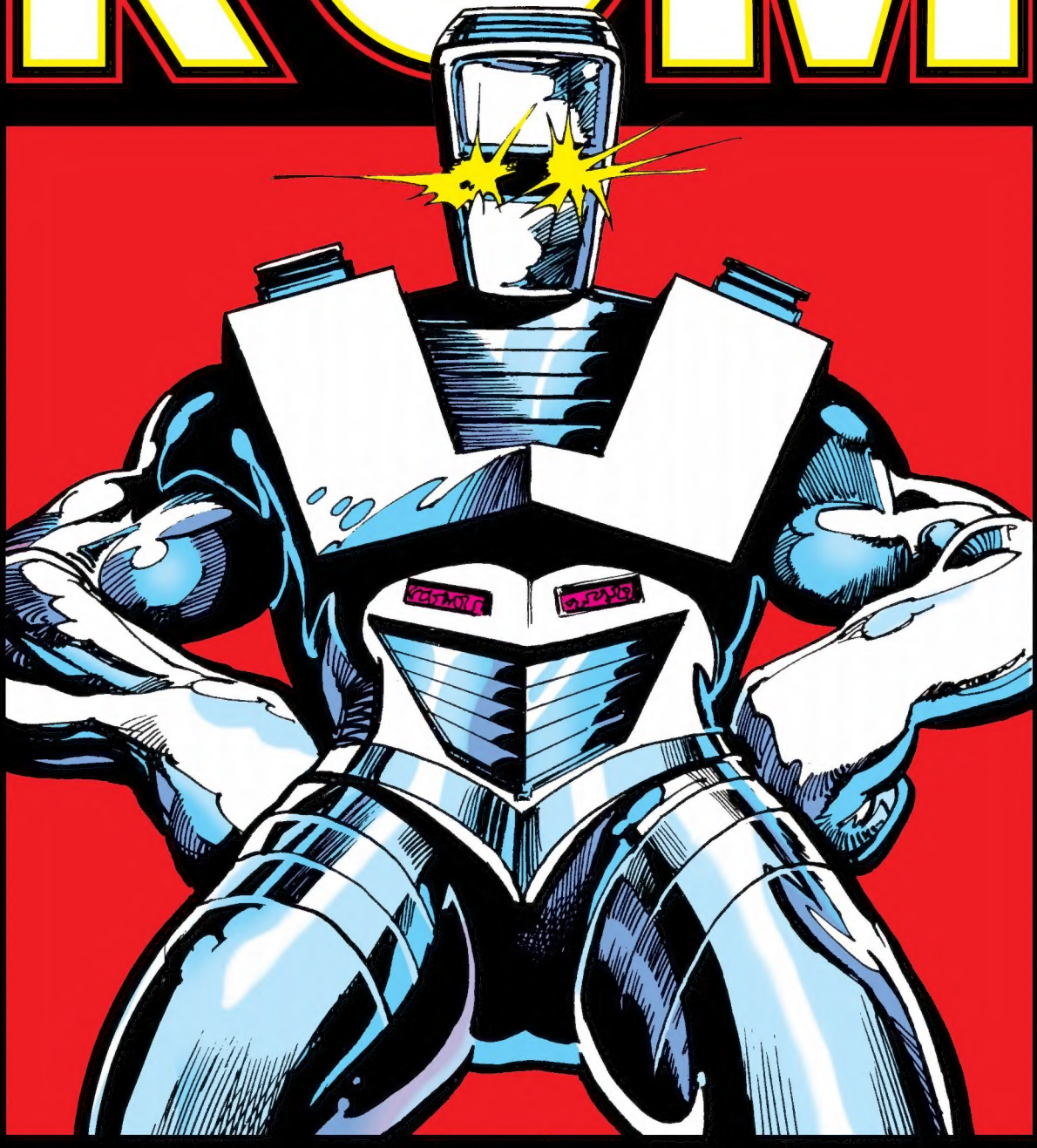
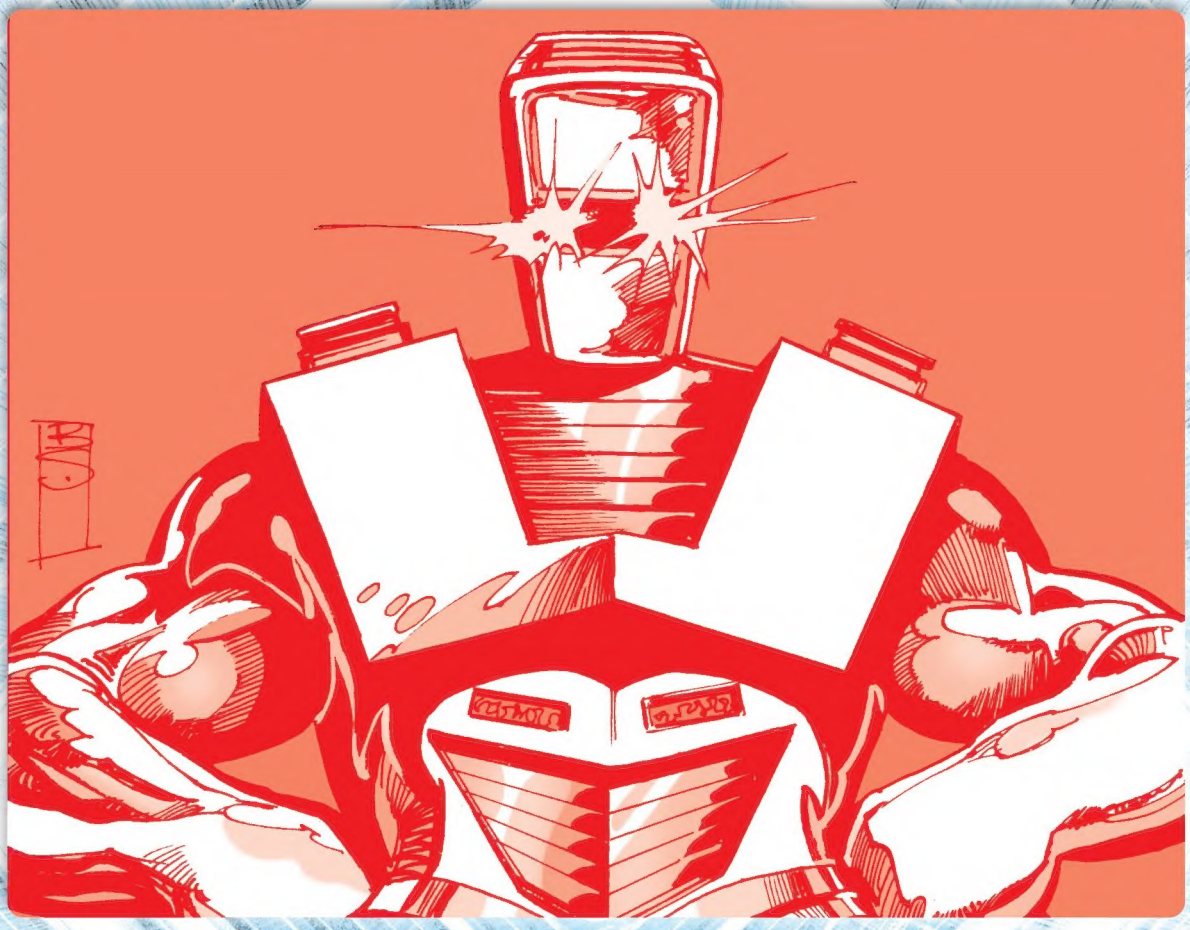
ROM



THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS

MANTLO • BUSCEMA • HALL

EPIC COLLECTION



ROM

THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS

VOLUME 3

1982-1983

ROM #34-47 & ANNUAL #2 AND *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #99*

EPIC COLLECTION

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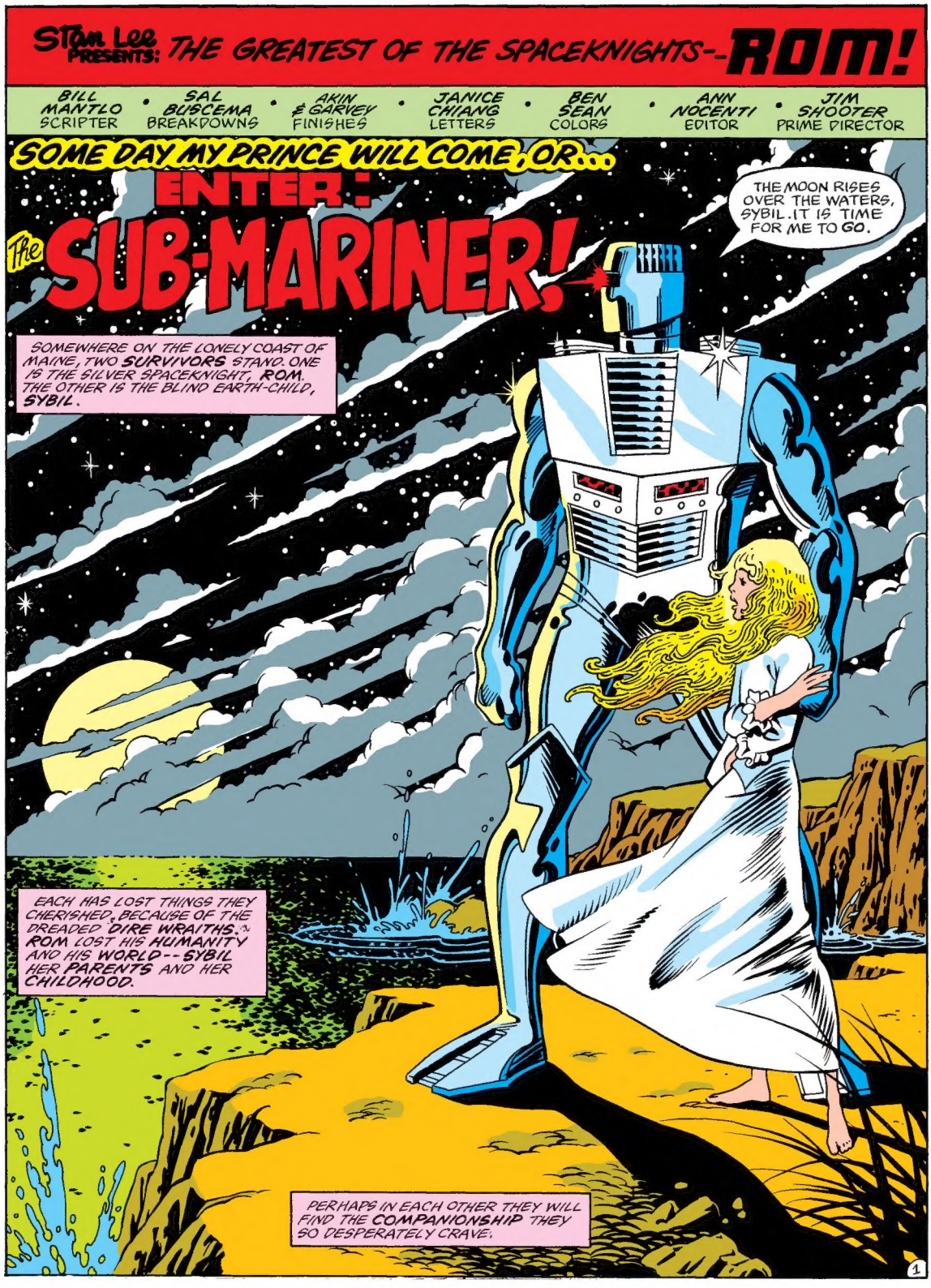
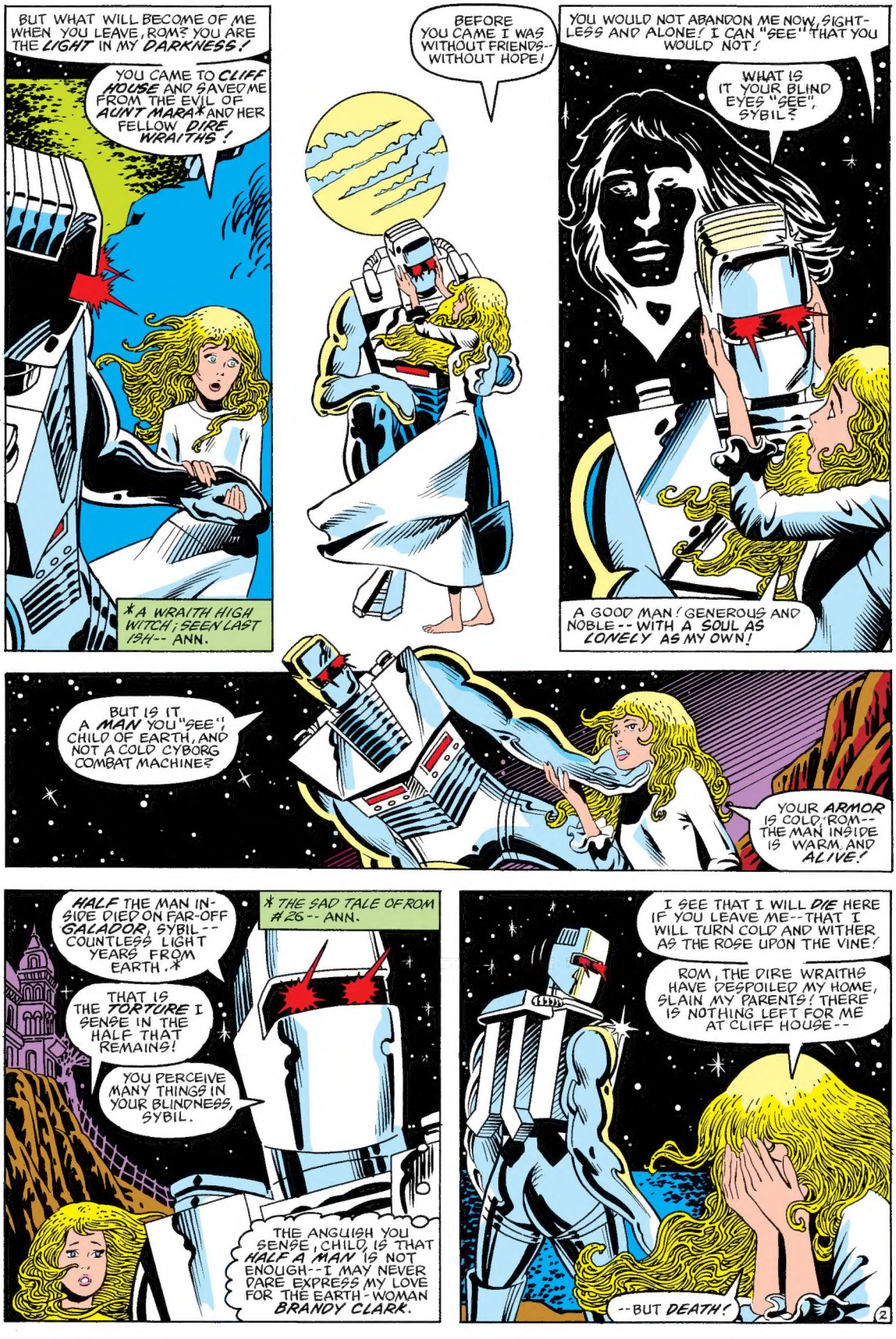
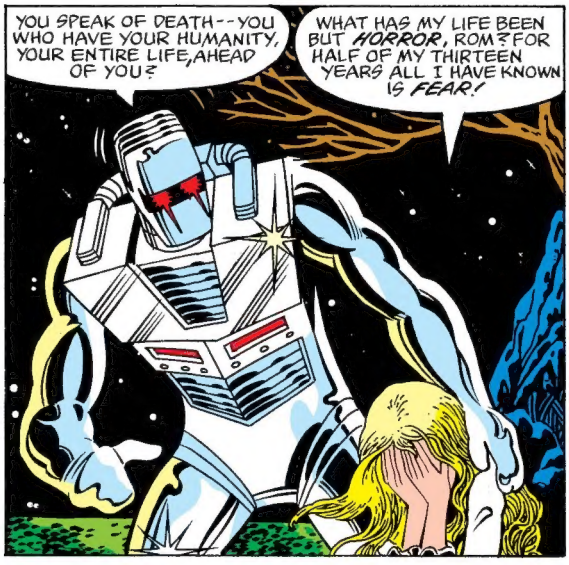
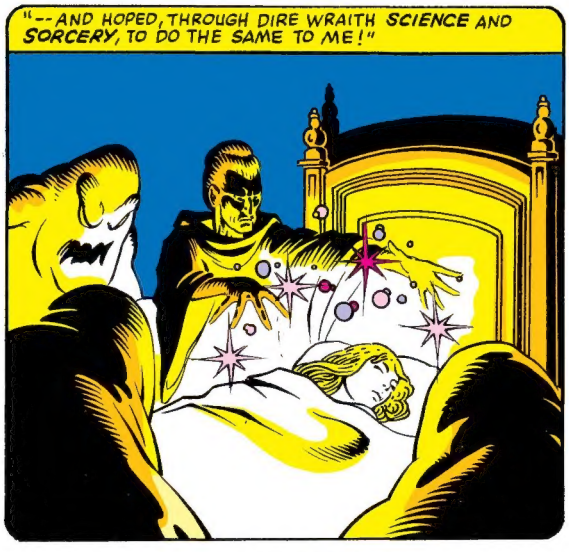
ROM
TM
IN THE REALM OF THE SUB-MARINER!
MILGROM

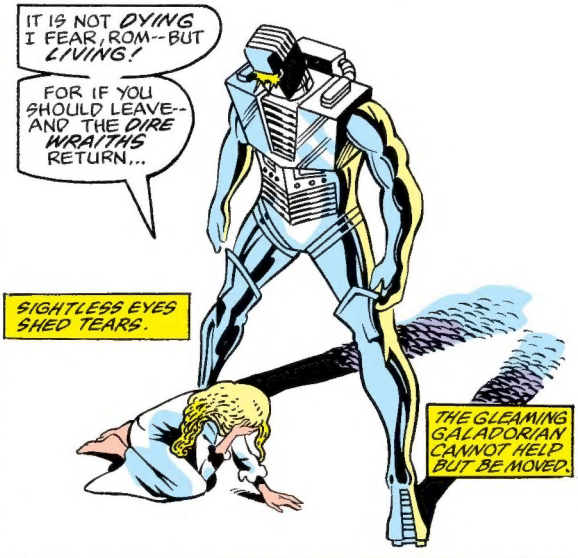

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPTER
SAL BUSCEMA BREAKDOWNS
AKIN & GARVEY FINISHES
JANICE CHIANG LETTERS
BEN SEAN COLORS
ANN NOCENTI EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
SOME DAY MY PRINCE WILL COME, OR...
ENTER: The SUB-MARINER!
THE MOON RISES OVER THE WATERS, SYBIL. IT IS TIME FOR ME TO GO.
SOMEWHERE ON THE LONELY COAST OF MAINE, TWO SURVIVORS STAND. ONE IS THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT, ROM. THE OTHER IS THE BLIND EARTH-CHILD, SYBIL.
EACH HAS LOST THINGS THEY CHERISHED, BECAUSE OF THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS. ROM LOST HIS HUMANITY AND HIS WORLD--SYBIL HER PARENTS AND HER CHILDHOOD.
PERHAPS IN EACH OTHER THEY WILL FIND THE COMPANIONSHIP THEY SO DESPERATELY CRAVE.
1

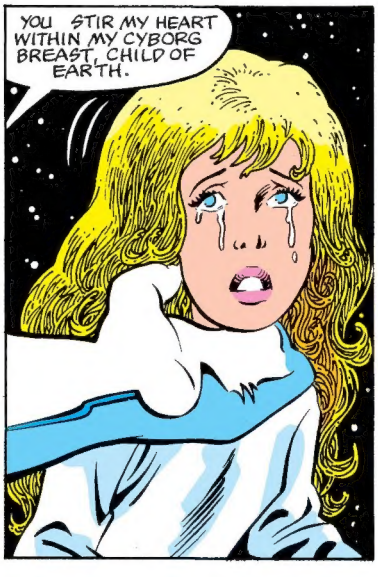

BUT WHAT WILL BECOME OF ME WHEN YOU LEAVE, ROM? YOU ARE THE LIGHT IN MY DARKNESS!
YOU CAME TO CLIFF HOUSE AND SAVED ME FROM THE EVIL OF AUNT MARA* AND HER FELLOW DIRE WRAITHS!
*A WRAITH HIGH WITCH; SEEN LAST 194-- ANN.
BEFORE YOU CAME I WAS WITHOUT FRIENDS-- WITHOUT HOPE!
YOU WOULD NOT ABANDON ME NOW, SIGHTLESS AND ALONE! I CAN "SEE" THAT YOU WOULD NOT!
WHAT IS IT YOUR BLIND EYES "SEE", SYBIL?
A GOOD MAN! GENEROUS AND NOBLE-- WITH A SOUL AS LONELY AS MY OWN!
BUT IS IT A MAN YOU "SEE", CHILD OF EARTH, AND NOT A COLD CYBORG COMBAT MACHINE?
YOUR ARMOR IS COLD, ROM-- THE MAN INSIDE IS WARM AND ALIVE!
HALF THE MAN INSIDE DIED ON FAR-OFF GALADOR, SYBIL-- COUNTLESS LIGHT YEARS FROM EARTH.*
*THE SAD TALE OF ROM #26-- ANN.
THAT IS THE TORTURE I SENSE IN THE HALF THAT REMAINS!
YOU PERCEIVE MANY THINGS IN YOUR BLINDNESS, SYBIL.
THE ANGUISH YOU SENSE, CHILD, IS THAT HALF A MAN IS NOT ENOUGH-- I MAY NEVER DARE EXPRESS MY LOVE FOR THE EARTH-WOMAN BRANDY CLARK.
I SEE THAT I WILL DIE HERE IF YOU LEAVE ME-- THAT I WILL TURN COLD AND WITHER AS THE ROSE UPON THE VINE!
ROM, THE DIRE WRAITHS HAVE DESPOILED MY HOME, SLAIN MY PARENTS! THERE IS NOTHING LEFT FOR ME AT CLIFF HOUSE--
--BUT DEATH!
2

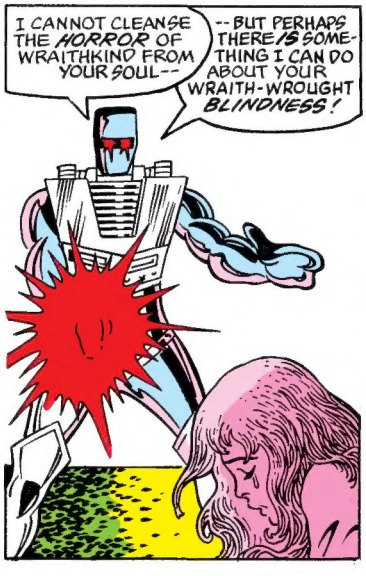

YOU SPEAK OF DEATH--YOU WHO HAVE YOUR HUMANITY, YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, AHEAD OF YOU?
WHAT HAS MY LIFE BEEN BUT HORROR, ROM? FOR HALF OF MY THIRTEEN YEARS ALL I HAVE KNOWN IS FEAR!

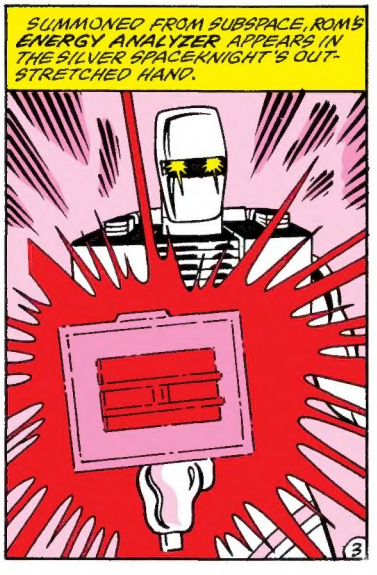
"YET, UNTIL YOUR COMING, I NEVER SUSPECTED THAT ITS SOURCE, AUNT MARA--SHE WHO CAME TO RAISE ME AFTER MY PARENTS PERISHED--WAS INHUMAN IN ORIGIN.
"NOW I KNOW 'TWAS SHE WHO KILLED THEM, AND MUTATED MY DOG INTO A MONSTER--

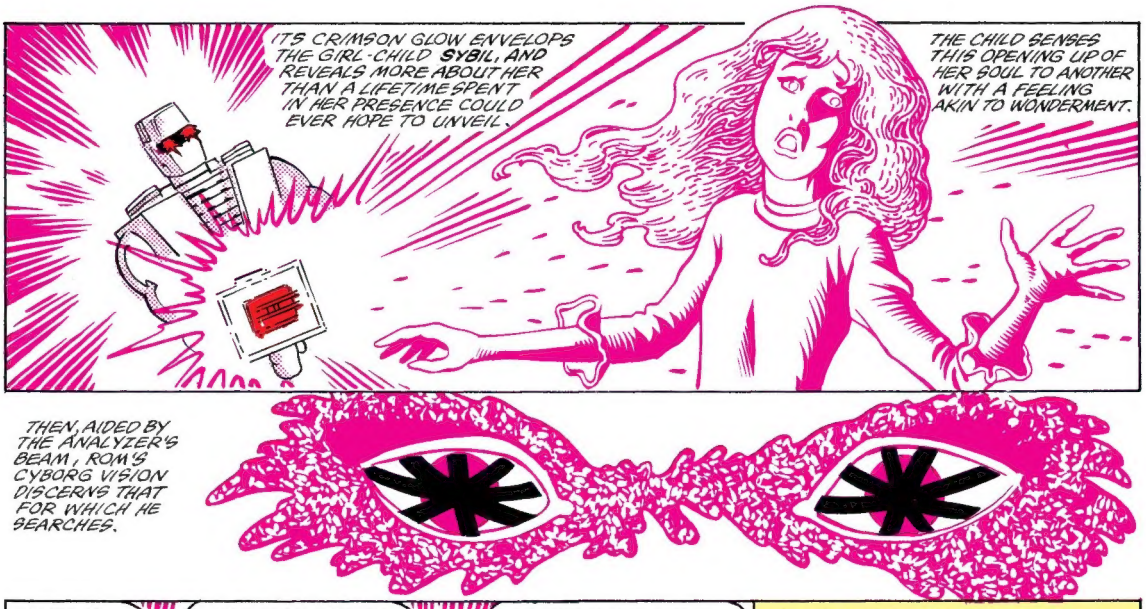

"--AND HOPED, THROUGH DIRE WRAITH SCIENCE AND SORCERY, TO DO THE SAME TO ME!"

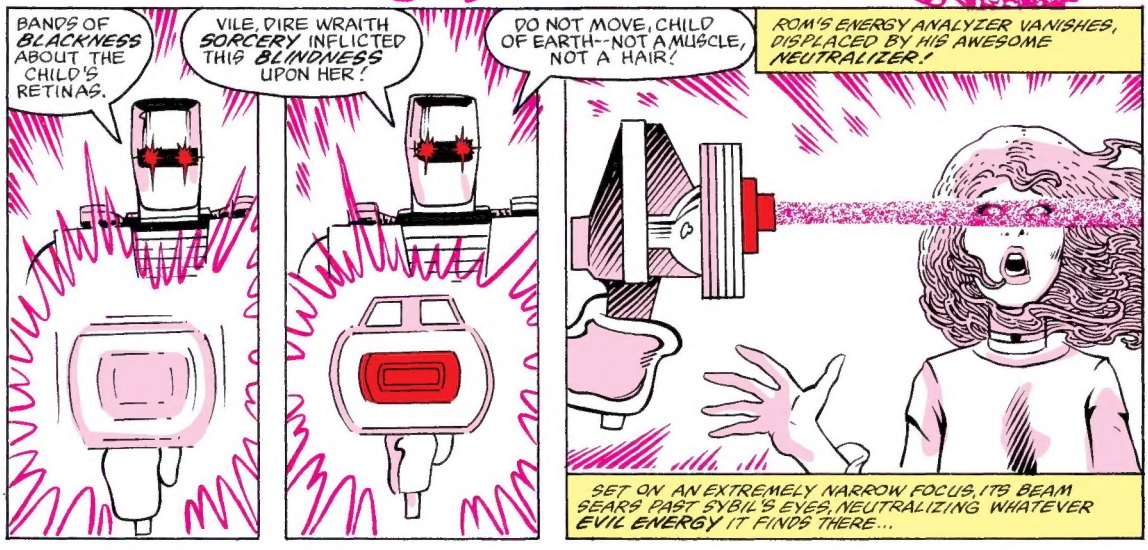

IT IS NOT DYING I FEAR, ROM--BUT LIVING!
FOR IF YOU SHOULD LEAVE--AND THE DIRE WRAITHS RETURN...
SIGHTLESS EYES SHED TEARS.
THE GLEAMING GALADORIAN CANNOT HELP BUT BE MOVED.

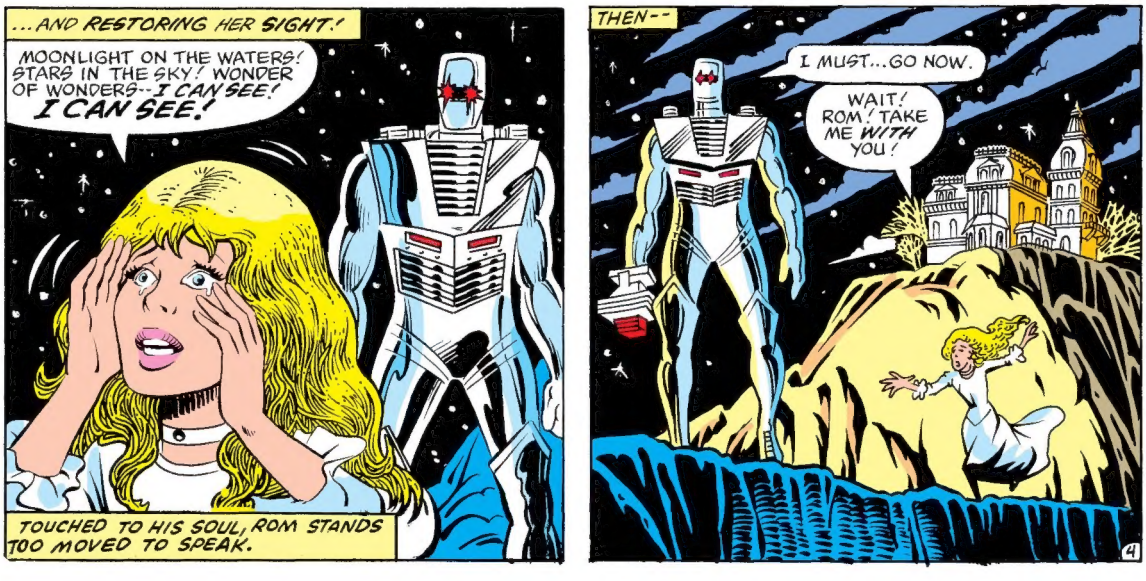

YOU STIR MY HEART WITHIN MY CYBORG BREAST, CHILD OF EARTH.

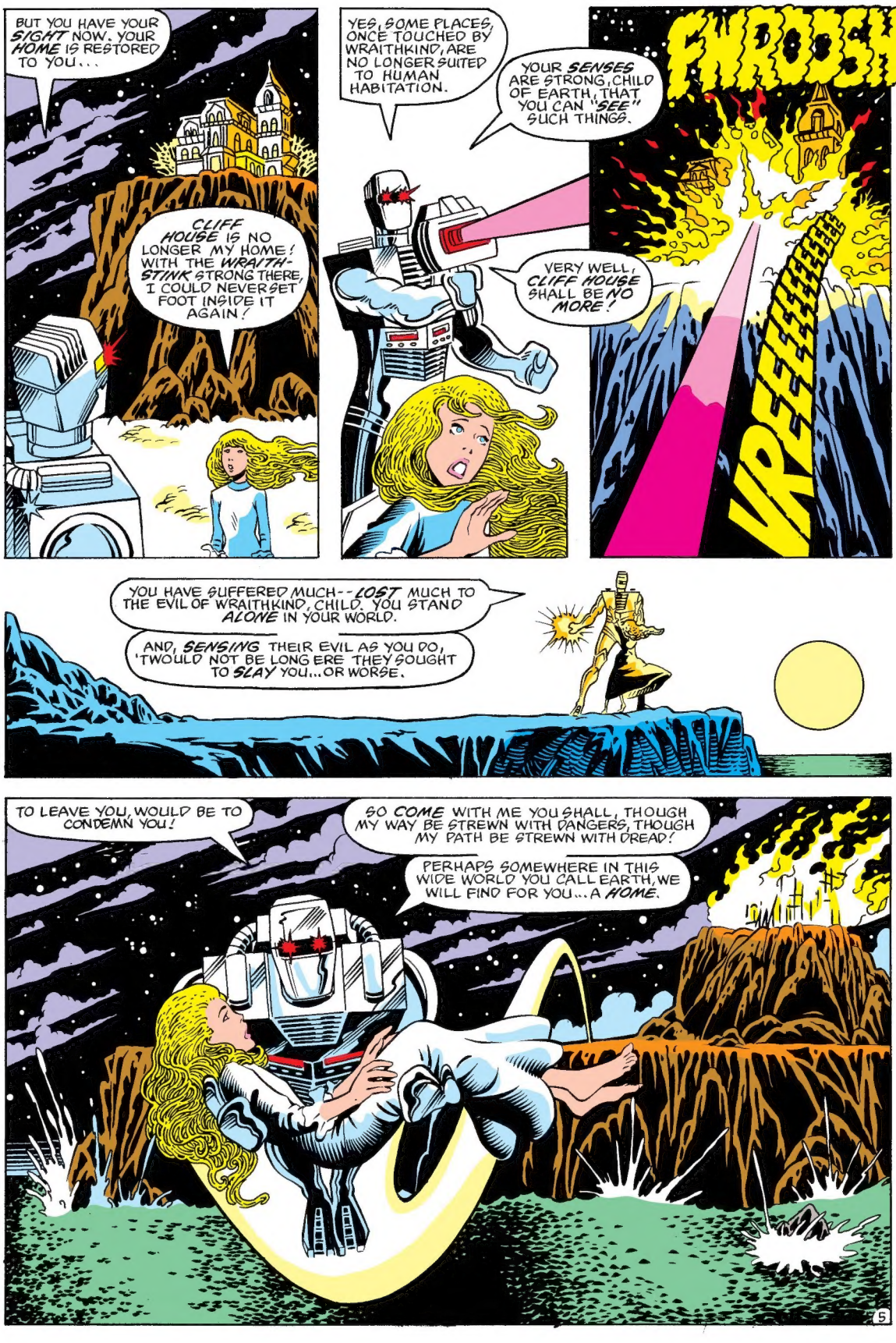

I CANNOT CLEANSE THE HORROR OF WRAITHKIND FROM YOUR SOUL--
--BUT PERHAPS THERE IS SOMETHING I CAN DO ABOUT YOUR WRAITH-WROUGHT BLINDNESS!

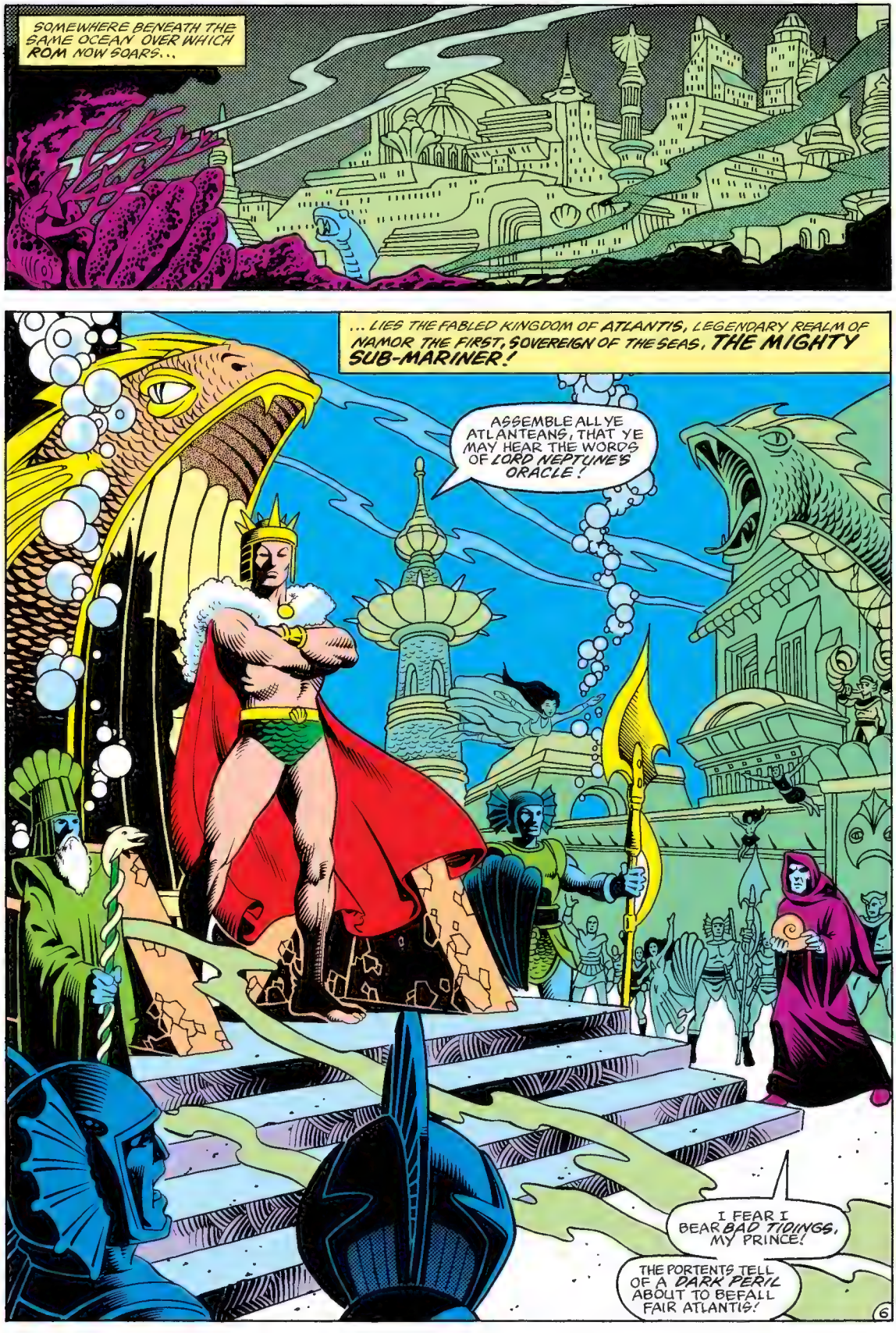

SUMMONED FROM SUBSPACE, ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER APPEARS IN THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT'S OUTSTRETCHED HAND.
3

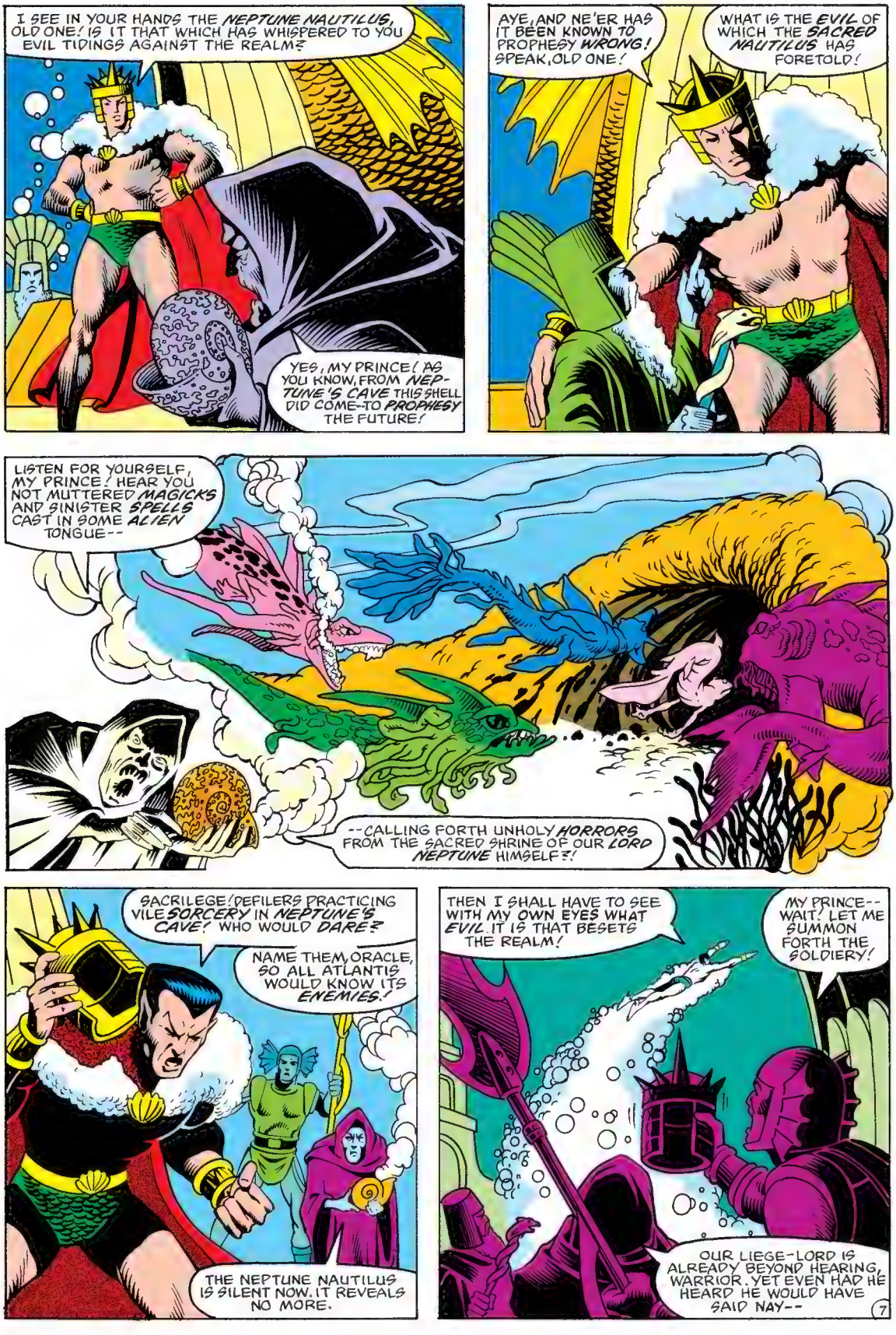

ITS CRIMSON GLOW ENVELOPS THE GIRL-CHILD SYBIL, AND REVEALS MORE ABOUT HER THAN A LIFETIME SPENT IN HER PRESENCE COULD EVER HOPE TO UNVEIL.
THE CHILD SENSES THIS OPENING UP OF HER SOUL TO ANOTHER WITH A FEELING AKIN TO WONDERMENT.
THEN, AIDED BY THE ANALYZER'S BEAM, ROM'S CYBORG VISION DISCERNS THAT FOR WHICH HE SEARCHES.

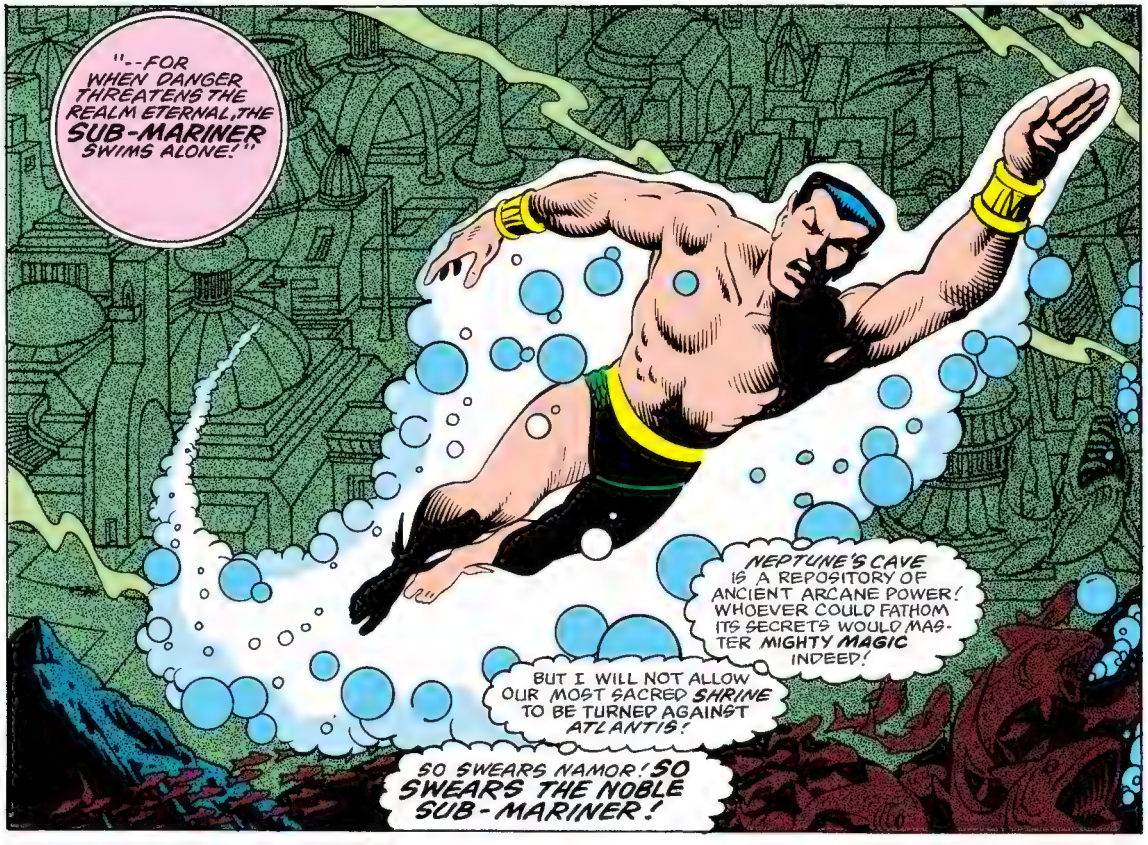

BANDS OF BLACKNESS ABOUT THE CHILD'S RETINAS.
VILE, DIRE WRAITH SORCERY INFLICTED THIS BLINDNESS UPON HER!
DO NOT MOVE, CHILD OF EARTH--NOT A MUSCLE, NOT A HAIR!
ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER VANISHES, DISPLACED BY HIS AWESOME NEUTRALIZER!
SET ON AN EXTREMELY NARROW FOCUS, ITS BEAM SEARS PAST SYBIL'S EYES, NEUTRALIZING WHATEVER EVIL ENERGY IT FINDS THERE...

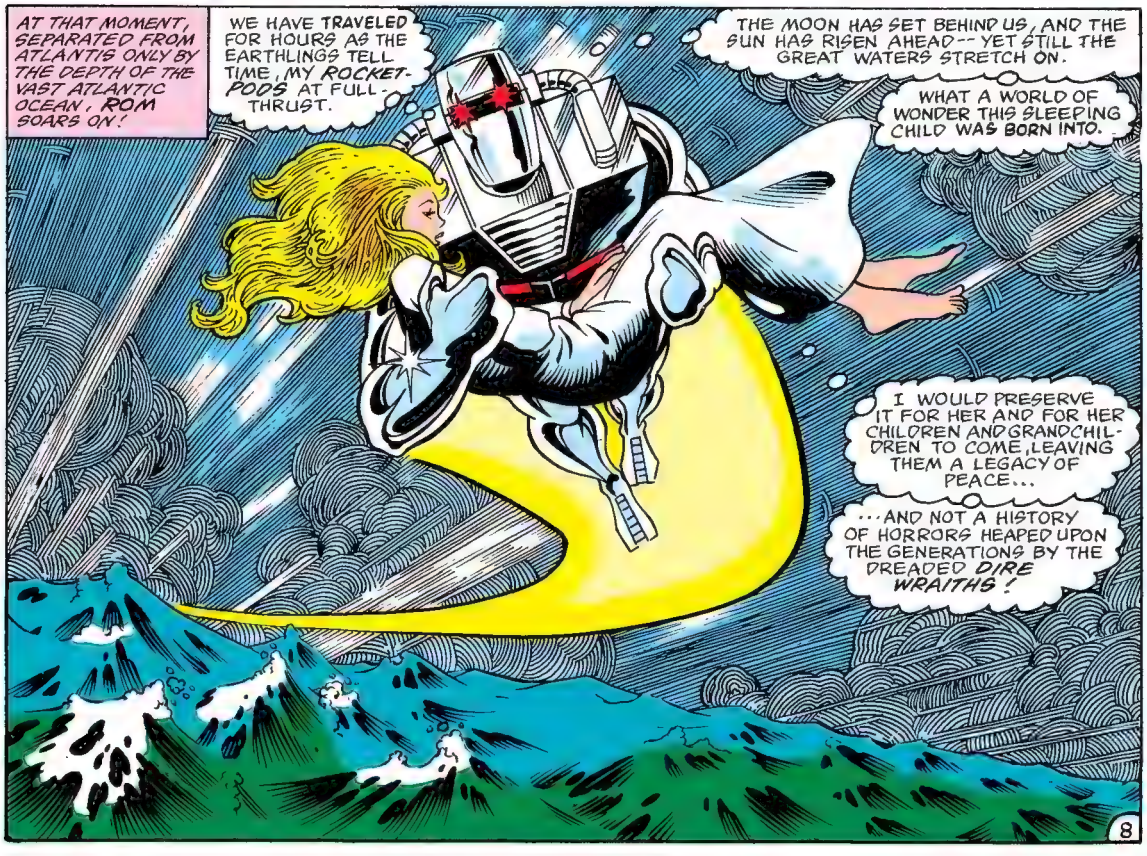

...AND RESTORING HER SIGHT!
MOONLIGHT ON THE WATERS! STARS IN THE SKY! WONDER OF WONDERS--I CAN SEE! I CAN SEE!
TOUCHED TO HIS SOUL, ROM STANDS TOO MOVED TO SPEAK.
THEN--
I MUST...GO NOW.
WAIT! ROM! TAKE ME WITH YOU!
4


BUT YOU HAVE YOUR SIGHT NOW. YOUR HOME IS RESTORED TO YOU...
CLIFF HOUSE IS NO LONGER MY HOME! WITH THE WRAITH-STINK STRONG THERE, I COULD NEVER SET FOOT INSIDE IT AGAIN!
YES, SOME PLACES, ONCE TOUCHED BY WRAITHKIND, ARE NO LONGER SUITED TO HUMAN HABITATION.
YOUR SENSES ARE STRONG, CHILD OF EARTH, THAT YOU CAN "SEE" SUCH THINGS.
VERY WELL, CLIFF HOUSE SHALL BE NO MORE!
FWOOSH
VREEEEEEEEE
YOU HAVE SUFFERED MUCH--LOST MUCH TO THE EVIL OF WRAITHKIND, CHILD. YOU STAND ALONE IN YOUR WORLD.
AND, SENSING THEIR EVIL AS YOU DO, 'TWOULD NOT BE LONG ERE THEY SOUGHT TO SLAY YOU...OR WORSE.
TO LEAVE YOU, WOULD BE TO CONDEMN YOU!
SO COME WITH ME YOU SHALL, THOUGH MY WAY BE STREWN WITH DANGERS, THOUGH MY PATH BE STREWN WITH DREAD!
PERHAPS SOMEWHERE IN THIS WIDE WORLD YOU CALL EARTH, WE WILL FIND FOR YOU...A HOME.
5


SOMEWHERE BENEATH THE SAME OCEAN OVER WHICH ROM NOW SOARS...
...LIES THE FABLED KINGDOM OF ATLANTIS, LEGENDARY REALM OF NAMOR THE FIRST, SOVEREIGN OF THE SEAS, THE MIGHTY SUB-MARINER!
ASSEMBLE ALL YE ATLANTEANS, THAT YE MAY HEAR THE WORDS OF LORD NEPTUNE'S ORACLE!
I FEAR I BEAR BAD TIDINGS, MY PRINCE!
THE PORTENTS TELL OF A DARK PERIL ABOUT TO BEFALL FAIR ATLANTIS!
6

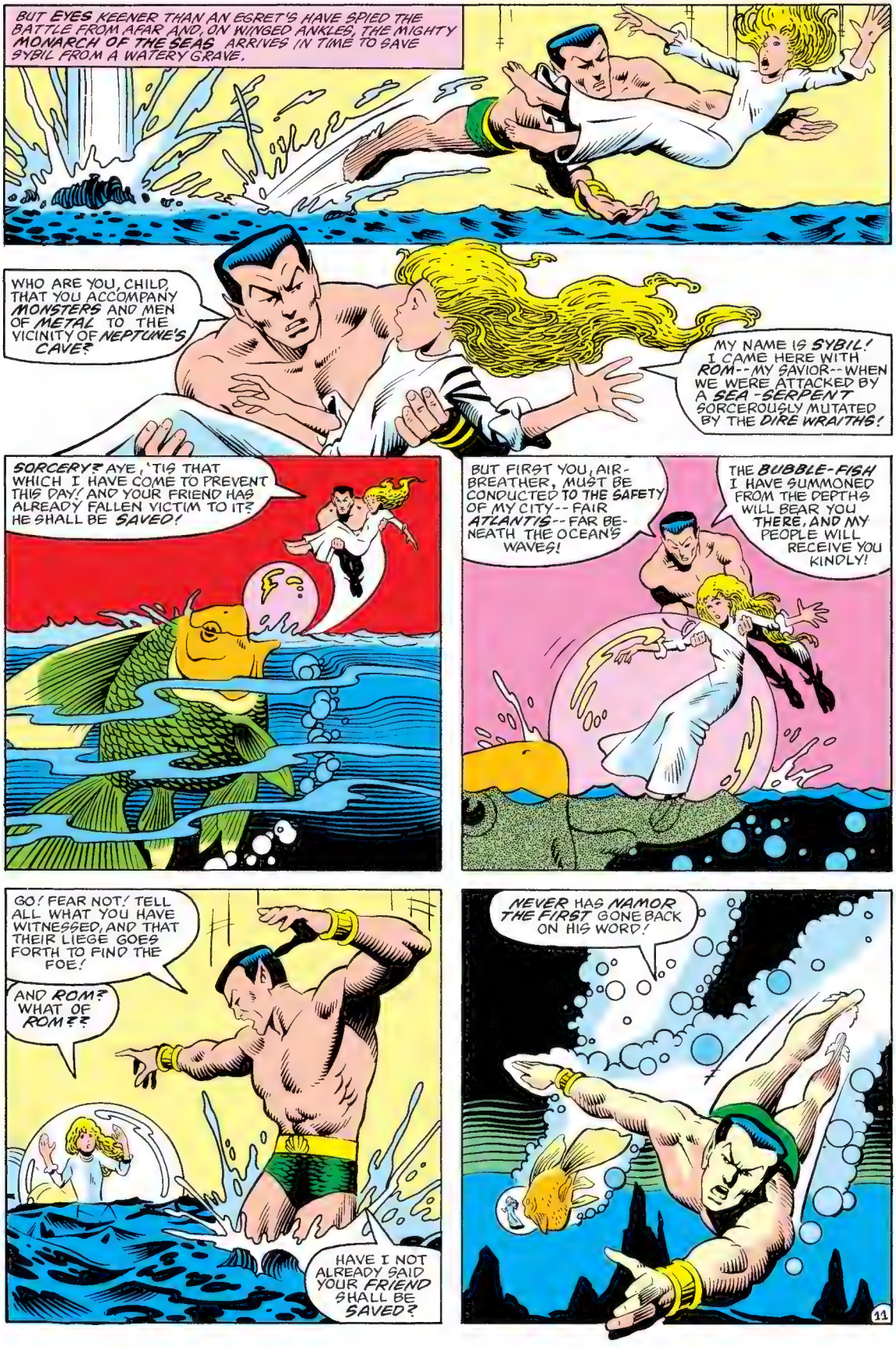

I SEE IN YOUR HANDS THE NEPTUNE NAUTILUS, OLD ONE! IS IT THAT WHICH HAS WHISPERED TO YOU EVIL TIDINGS AGAINST THE REALM?
YES, MY PRINCE! AS YOU KNOW, FROM NEPTUNE'S CAVE THIS SHELL DID COME-TO PROPHESY THE FUTURE!
AYE, AND NE'ER HAS IT BEEN KNOWN TO PROPHESY WRONG! SPEAK, OLD ONE!
WHAT IS THE EVIL OF WHICH THE SACRED NAUTILUS HAS FORETOLD!
LISTEN FOR YOURSELF, MY PRINCE! HEAR YOU NOT MUTTERED MAGICKS AND SINISTER SPELLS CAST IN SOME ALIEN TONGUE--
--CALLING FORTH UNHOLY HORRORS FROM THE SACRED SHRINE OF OUR LORD NEPTUNE HIMSELF?!
SACRILEGE! DEFILERS PRACTICING VILE SORCERY IN NEPTUNE'S CAVE! WHO WOULD DARE?
NAME THEM, ORACLE, SO ALL ATLANTIS WOULD KNOW ITS ENEMIES!
THE NEPTUNE NAUTILUS IS SILENT NOW. IT REVEALS NO MORE.
THEN I SHALL HAVE TO SEE WITH MY OWN EYES WHAT EVIL IT IS THAT BESETS THE REALM!
MY PRINCE-- WAIT! LET ME SUMMON FORTH THE SOLDIERY!
OUR LIEGE-LORD IS ALREADY BEYOND HEARING, WARRIOR. YET EVEN HAD HE HEARD HE WOULD HAVE SAID NAY--
7

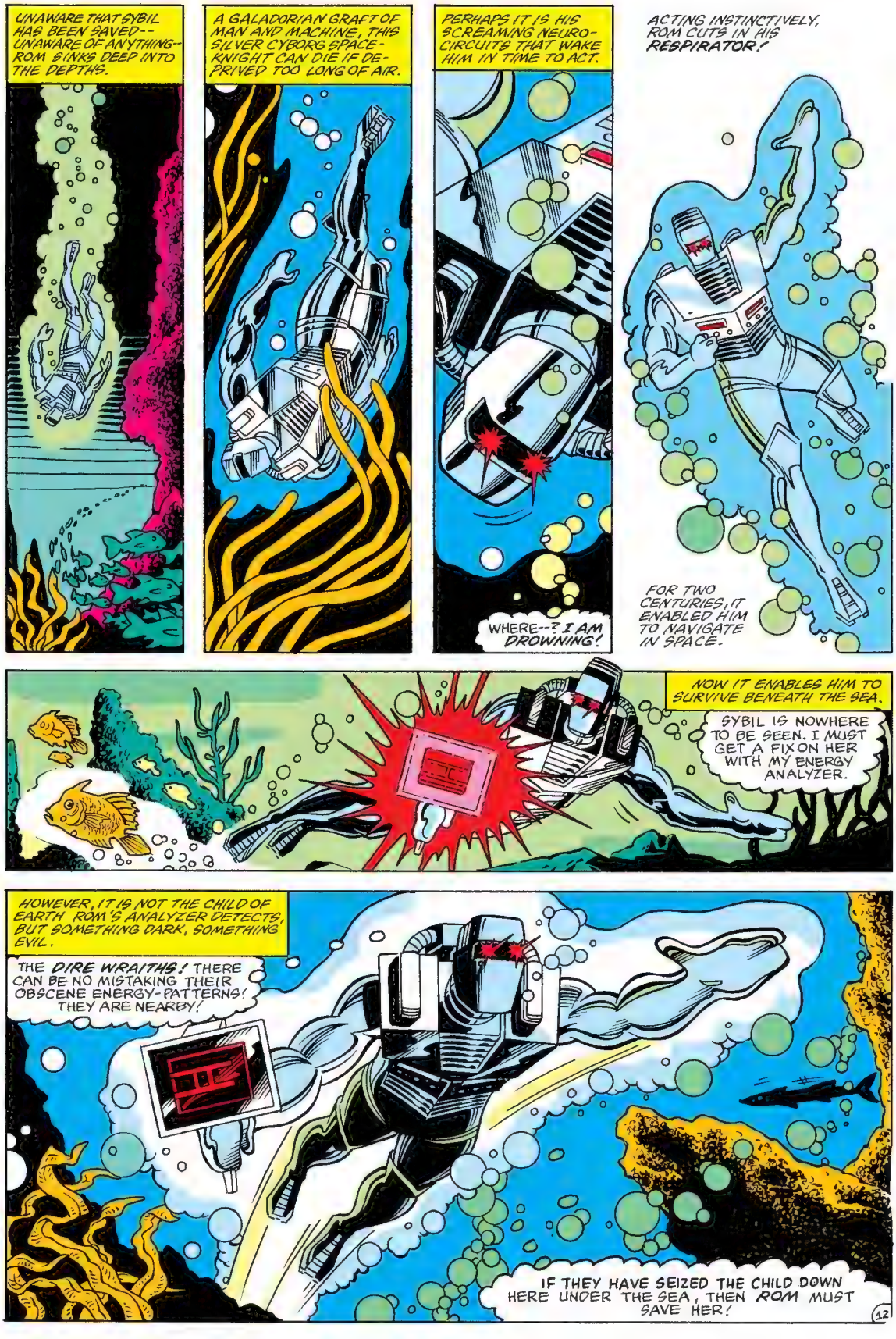

"--FOR WHEN DANGER THREATENS THE REALM ETERNAL, THE SUB-MARINER SWIMS ALONE!"
NEPTUNE'S CAVE IS A REPOSITORY OF ANCIENT ARCANE POWER! WHOEVER COULD FATHOM ITS SECRETS WOULD MASTER MIGHTY MAGIC INDEED!
BUT I WILL NOT ALLOW OUR MOST SACRED SHRINE TO BE TURNED AGAINST ATLANTIS!
SO SWEARS NAMOR! SO SWEARS THE NOBLE SUB-MARINER!


AT THAT MOMENT, SEPARATED FROM ATLANTIS ONLY BY THE DEPTH OF THE VAST ATLANTIC OCEAN, ROM SOARS ON!
WE HAVE TRAVELED FOR HOURS AS THE EARTHLINGS TELL TIME, MY ROCKET-PODS AT FULL-THRUST.
THE MOON HAS SET BEHIND US, AND THE SUN HAS RISEN AHEAD -- YET STILL THE GREAT WATERS STRETCH ON.
WHAT A WORLD OF WONDER THIS SLEEPING CHILD WAS BORN INTO.
I WOULD PRESERVE IT FOR HER AND FOR HER CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN TO COME, LEAVING THEM A LEGACY OF PEACE...
...AND NOT A HISTORY OF HORRORS HEAPED UPON THE GENERATIONS BY THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS!
8

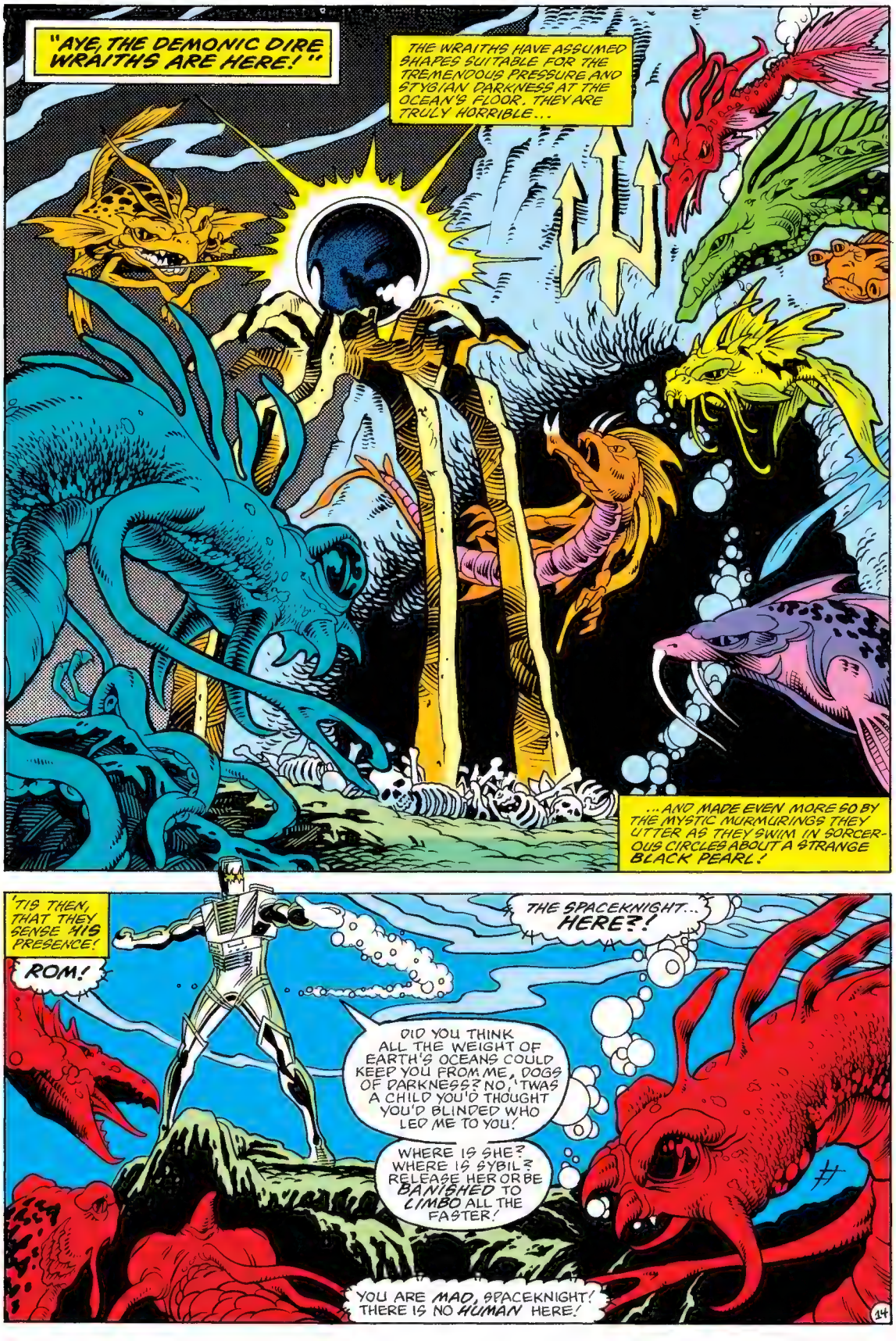
SUDDENLY, SYBIL AWAKES WITH A START...
ROM! THERE IS DANGER! THEY ARE HERE!
DANGER? WHAT IS IT, SYBIL? WHAT DO YOU SENSE?
WRAITHKIND--SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR! OH, ROM-- THEIR EVIL MAKES ME SHUDDER, AS IF THEIR DARKNESS WERE ABOUT TO DESCEND UPON ME AGAIN!
BANISH FEAR FROM YOUR HEART, CHILD OF EARTH. WE ARE FAR OUT OVER THE VAST WATERS. AND EVEN IF WRAITH-KIND SHOULD FIND US HERE--
--THERE IS NO WAY THEY CAN HARM YOU WHILE YOU ARE IN THE CARE OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
SCARCELY ARE THE WORDS SPOKEN, WHEN...
ROM! LOOK!
SEA-SERPENT-- RISING SLIME-SOAKED FROM THE DEPTHS, BREATHING SCALDING FIRE!
I MUST SUMMON MY ENERGY ANALYZER--
--AND SEE WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE IT IS WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH!
WHY NOT JUST SUMMON YOUR NEUTRALIZER AND SLAY THE SERPENT BEFORE IT SLAYS US!

I MUST ASCERTAIN WHETHER THE BEAST BE OF WRAITH OR EARTHLY ORIGIN BEFORE CHOOSING MY COURSE OF ACTION.
THE ENERGY ANALYZER BEAM BATHES THE SLAVERING SEA-SERPENT...
...AND REVEALS IT TO HAVE ONCE BEEN A HARMLESS ELECTRIC EEL, NOW HORRIBLY MUTATED BEYOND ALL PROPORTION IN SIZE AND SAVAGERY.
THE WRAITHS DID THAT--JUST AS THEY ALTERED MY POOR PUPPY, CONQUISTADOR, AND JUST AS THEY INTENDED TO DO TO ME.
YES, THERE IS WRAITH VILLAINY APPARENT HERE.
THOUGH HOW YOU CAN SEE WHAT ONLY MY CYBORG VISION SHOULD BE ABLE TO DETECT IS A MYSTERY...
...TO BE PONDERED LATER, AFTER WE HAVE DEALT WITH THE WRAITH MUTATION.
AGAIN ENERGY ANALYZER IS DISPLACED BY NEUTRALIZER...
...AND ITS HIGH WHINE COUNTERS THE ELECTRIC FIRE SPEWED FORTH BY THE SCREAMING SEA-SERPENT!
SHZZZZT
VREE
BUT, EVEN AS THE SEA-SERPENT IS NEUTRALIZED, IT LASHES OUT WITH EVERY LAST IOTA OF ITS ELECTRIC ENERGY, AND A LETHAL CURRENT ENGULFS ROM AND SYBIL!
ROM ABSORBS THE BRUNT OF IT IN HIS ARMOR, ACTING AS A LIVING LIGHTNING-ROD IN ORDER TO SAVE THE CHILD OF EARTH.
HE SUCCEEDS, BUT AT WHAT COST TO THEM BOTH?
CIRCUITS DISRUPTED, HE CAN NO LONGER REMAIN CONSCIOUS, MUCH LESS ALOFT.
THE TRACKLESS OCEAN WAITS BELOW.
10

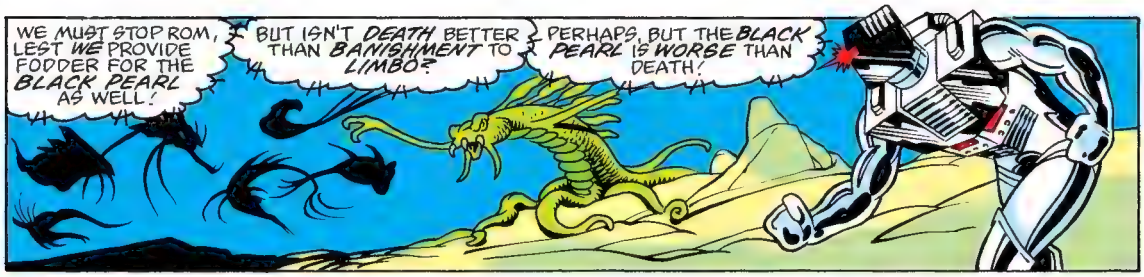

BUT EYES KEENER THAN AN EGRET'S HAVE SPIED THE BATTLE FROM AFAR AND, ON WINGED ANKLES, THE MIGHTY MONARCH OF THE SEAS ARRIVES IN TIME TO SAVE SYBIL FROM A WATERY GRAVE.
WHO ARE YOU, CHILD, THAT YOU ACCOMPANY MONSTERS AND MEN OF METAL TO THE VICINITY OF NEPTUNE'S CAVE?
MY NAME IS SYBIL! I CAME HERE WITH ROM--MY SAVIOR--WHEN WE WERE ATTACKED BY A SEA-SERPENT SORCEROUSLY MUTATED BY THE DIRE WRAITHS!
SORCERY? AYE, 'TIS THAT WHICH I HAVE COME TO PREVENT THIS DAY! AND YOUR FRIEND HAS ALREADY FALLEN VICTIM TO IT? HE SHALL BE SAVED!
BUT FIRST YOU, AIR-BREATHER, MUST BE CONDUCTED TO THE SAFETY OF MY CITY--FAIR ATLANTIS--FAR BENEATH THE OCEAN'S WAVES!
THE BUBBLE-FISH I HAVE SUMMONED FROM THE DEPTHS WILL BEAR YOU THERE, AND MY PEOPLE WILL RECEIVE YOU KINDLY!
GO! FEAR NOT! TELL ALL WHAT YOU HAVE WITNESSED, AND THAT THEIR LIEGE GOES FORTH TO FIND THE FOE!
AND ROM? WHAT OF ROM??
HAVE I NOT ALREADY SAID YOUR FRIEND SHALL BE SAVED?
NEVER HAS NAMOR THE FIRST GONE BACK ON HIS WORD!
11

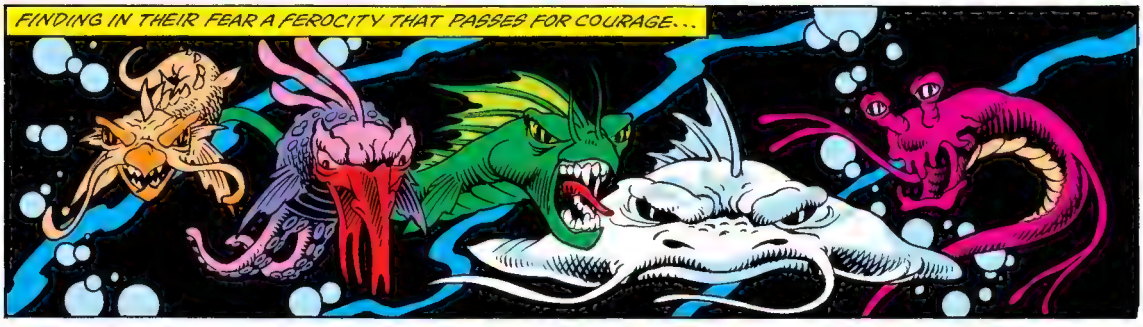

UNAWARE THAT SYBIL HAS BEEN SAVED--UNAWARE OF ANYTHING--ROM SINKS DEEP INTO THE DEPTHS.
A GALADORIAN GRAFT OF MAN AND MACHINE, THIS SILVER CYBORG SPACE-KNIGHT CAN DIE IF DEPRIVED TOO LONG OF AIR.
PERHAPS IT IS HIS SCREAMING NEURO-CIRCUITS THAT WAKE HIM IN TIME TO ACT.
WHERE--? I AM DROWNING!
ACTING INSTINCTIVELY, ROM CUTS IN HIS RESPIRATOR!
FOR TWO CENTURIES, IT ENABLED HIM TO NAVIGATE IN SPACE.
NOW IT ENABLES HIM TO SURVIVE BENEATH THE SEA.
SYBIL IS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN. I MUST GET A FIX ON HER WITH MY ENERGY ANALYZER.
HOWEVER, IT IS NOT THE CHILD OF EARTH ROM'S ANALYZER DETECTS, BUT SOMETHING DARK, SOMETHING EVIL.
THE DIRE WRAITHS! THERE CAN BE NO MISTAKING THEIR OBSCENE ENERGY-PATTERNS! THEY ARE NEARBY!
IF THEY HAVE SEIZED THE CHILD DOWN HERE UNDER THE SEA, THEN ROM MUST SAVE HER!
12

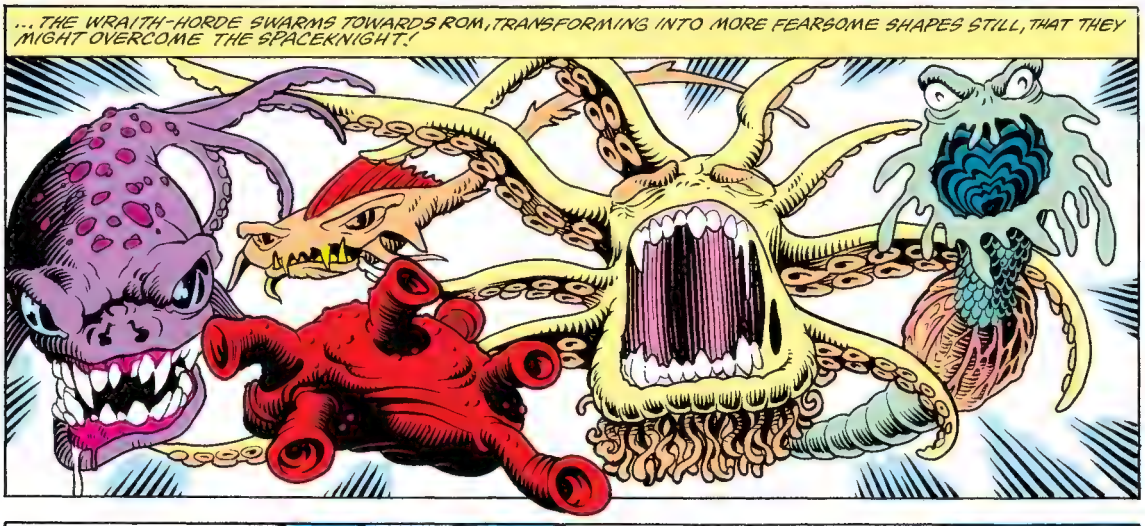
AS ROM SEARCHES FOR SYBIL, THE MONARCH OF THE SEAS SEARCHES FOR HIM...
WOULD THAT YOU COULD SPEAK, MY FINNY FRIENDS--THEN YOU MIGHT LEAD ME TO HE WHOM I SEEK.
I SENSE WITHIN THIS BARRACUDA A GREAT DREAD. PERHAPS THE GIRL'S SAVIOR IS THE CAUSE OF THIS UNNATURAL FRIGHT.
IN ANY EVENT THE SOURCE OF HIS FEAR SEEMS TO BE--
--AT THE SITE OF ATLANTIS'S MOST SACRED SHRINE!
WOE BETIDE THOSE WHO WOULD STAND AGAINST THIS PRINCE OF ATLANTIS!
MEANWHILE, SILENCING HIS FIERY ROCKET-PODS LEST THEY REVEAL HIS PRESENCE TOO SOON, ROM FOLLOWS HIS ANALYZER'S BEAM TO THE SOURCE OF THE EVIL IT HAS DETECTED.
THOUGH STILL I SEE NO SIGN OF SYBIL, THERE CAN NO LONGER BE ANY DOUBT--
--THAT THE CHILDREN OF THE DREAD DARK NEBULA PRACTICE THEIR ANCIENT AND ABHORRENT MAGICKS HERE BENEATH EARTH'S OCEAN!
13

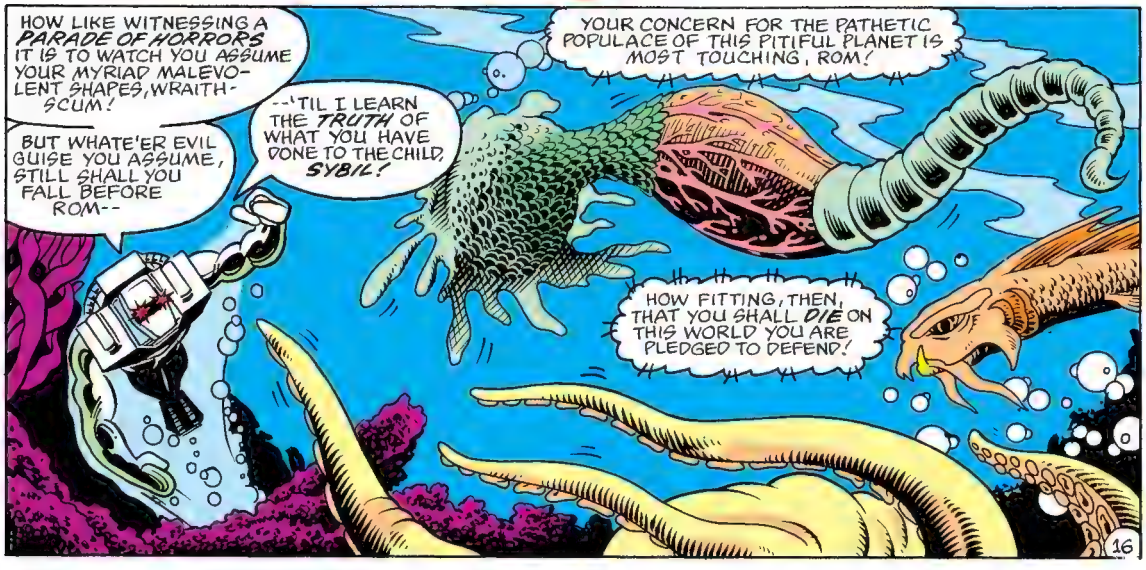

"AYE, THE DEMONIC DIRE WRAITHS ARE HERE!"
THE WRAITHS HAVE ASSUMED SHAPES SUITABLE FOR THE TREMENDOUS PRESSURE AND STYGIAN DARKNESS AT THE OCEAN'S FLOOR. THEY ARE TRULY HORRIBLE...
...AND MADE EVEN MORE SO BY THE MYSTIC MURMURINGS THEY UTTER AS THEY SWIM IN SORCEROUS CIRCLES ABOUT A STRANGE BLACK PEARL!
'TIS THEN, THAT THEY SENSE HIS PRESENCE!
ROM!
THE SPACEKNIGHT... HERE?!
DID YOU THINK ALL THE WEIGHT OF EARTH'S OCEANS COULD KEEP YOU FROM ME, DOGS OF DARKNESS? NO, 'TWAS A CHILD YOU'D THOUGHT YOU'D BLINDED WHO LED ME TO YOU!
WHERE IS SHE? WHERE IS SYBIL? RELEASE HER OR BE BANISHED TO LIMBO ALL THE FASTER!
YOU ARE MAD, SPACEKNIGHT! THERE IS NO HUMAN HERE!
14

ONLY WRAITHKIND, DEEP IN INCANTATION AT THIS SUBMERGED FOUNT OF POWER-- THIS SUBSEA CAVE WHICH WE HAVE DISCOVERED!
WE HOPE TO AWAKEN AN ANCIENT EVIL LONG DORMANT, ROM, AND YOU SHALL NOT INTERFERE!
BUT WHO WILL STOP THE SPACEKNIGHT?
HE HAS BANISHED SO MANY OF OUR BRETHREN TO LIMBO!
LET US FLEE AND WORK OUR MAGIC ELSEWHERE!
COWARDS! CURS! YOU WILL EITHER FACE THE SPACEKNIGHT WHILE I FINISH WEAVING OUR FEARSOME SPELL--
GGKKK'SSSS!
--OR YOU WILL BE FED TO THE BLACK PEARL!
THE BLACK PEARL SEEMS TO GLOW WITH AN EAGER EBONY ENERGY! TENDRILS OF DARKNESS REACH OUT... AND CONSUME THE SHRIEKING WRAITH-FISH!
THEN, ITS LOATHSOME APPETITE SATIATED, THE BLACK PEARL UNLEASHES THAT LIFE-ENERGY IT HAS SUCKED FROM THE SOUL OF THE WRAITH...
...IN A NARROW BLACK BEAM DIRECTED DEEP INTO THE INTERIOR OF NEPTUNE'S CAVE!
15

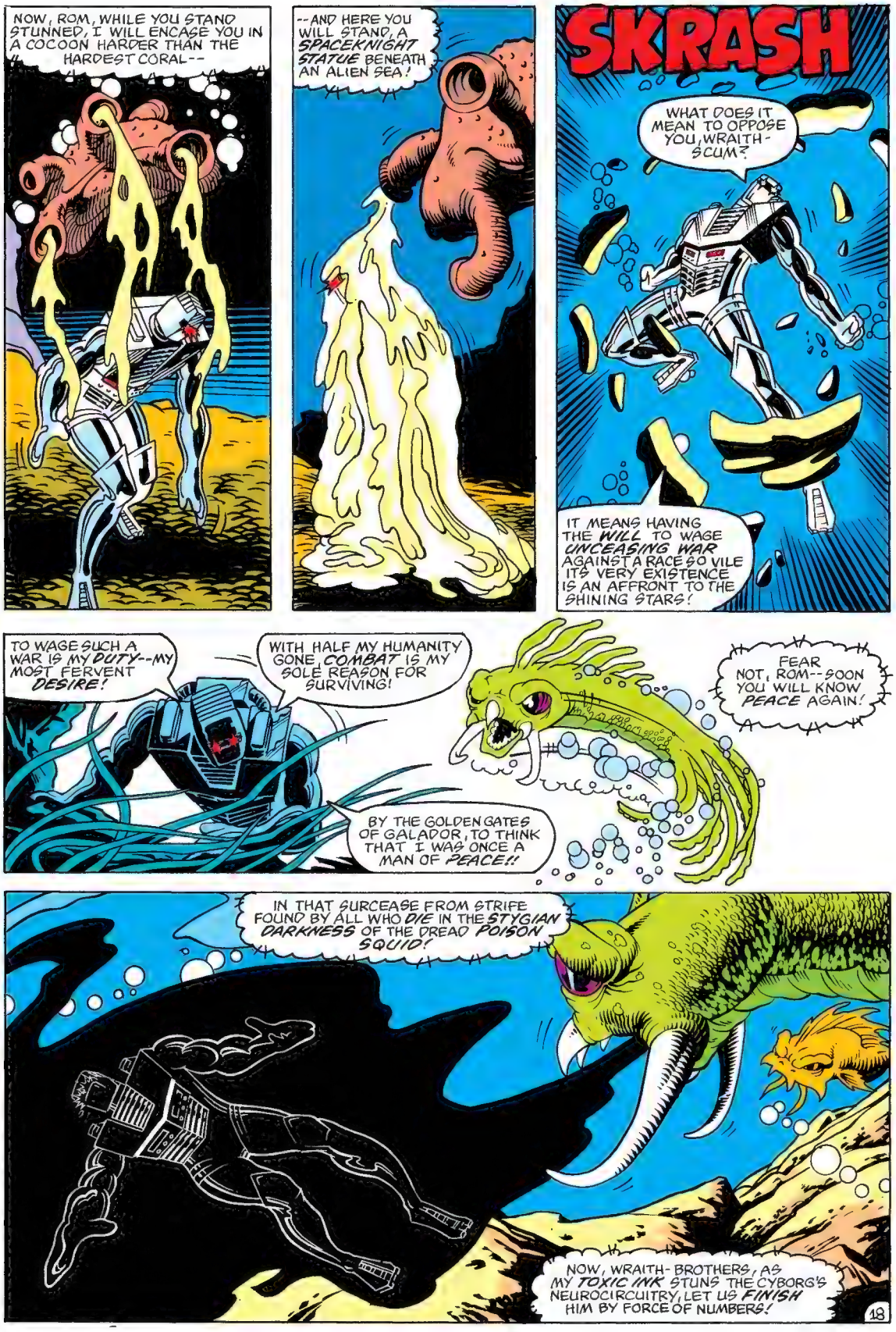

WE MUST STOP ROM, LEST WE PROVIDE FODDER FOR THE BLACK PEARL AS WELL!
BUT ISN'T DEATH BETTER THAN BANISHMENT TO LIMBO?
PERHAPS, BUT THE BLACK PEARL IS WORSE THAN DEATH!


FINDING IN THEIR FEAR A FEROCITY THAT PASSES FOR COURAGE...

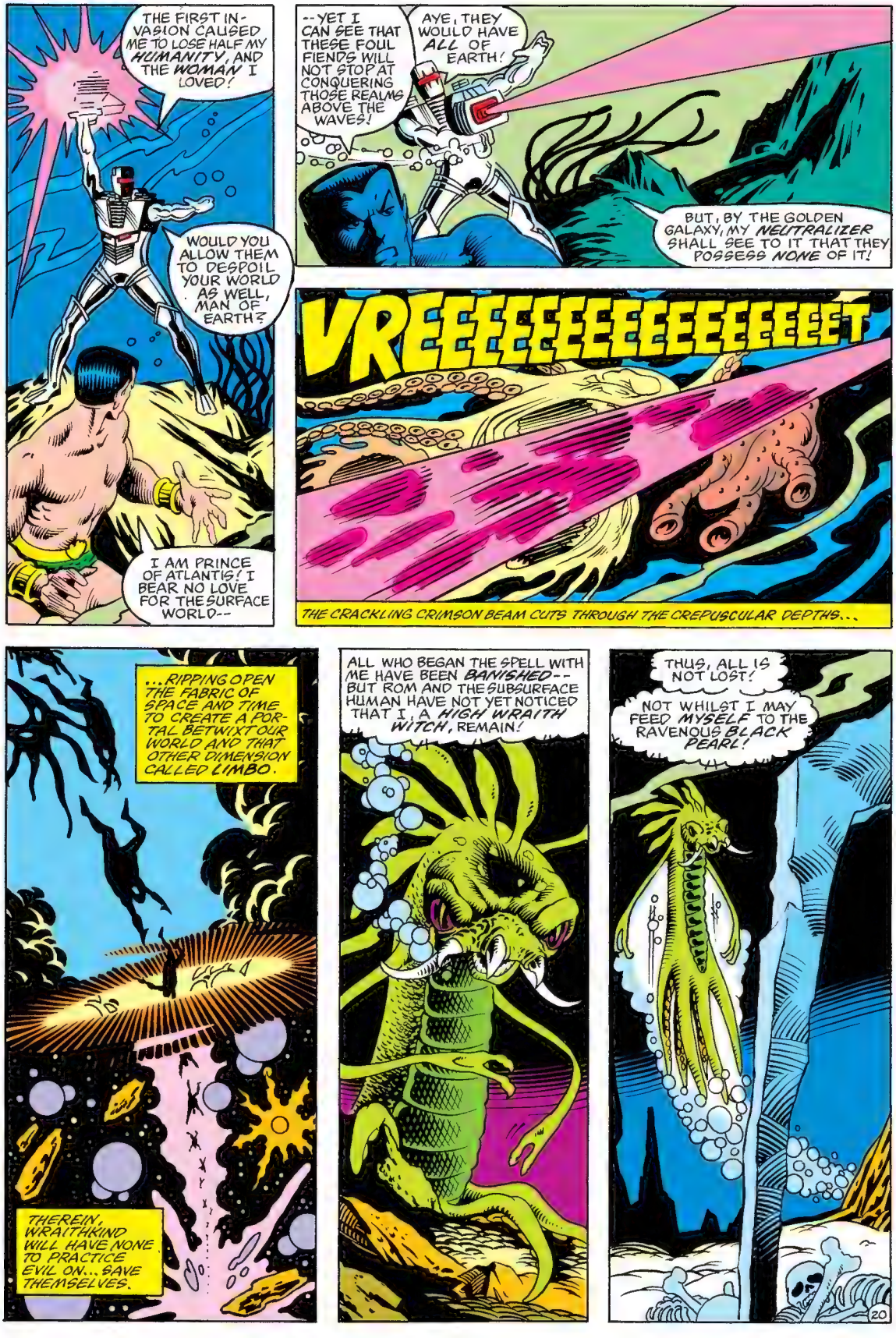

...THE WRAITH-HORDE SWARMS TOWARDS ROM, TRANSFORMING INTO MORE FEARSOME SHAPES STILL, THAT THEY MIGHT OVERCOME THE SPACEKNIGHT!

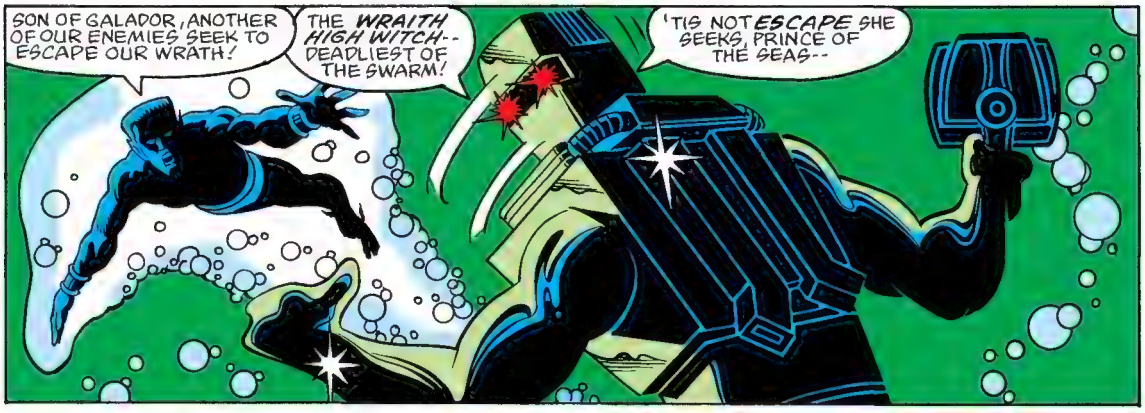

HOW LIKE WITNESSING A PARADE OF HORRORS IT IS TO WATCH YOU ASSUME YOUR MYRIAD MALEVOLENT SHAPES, WRAITH-SCUM!
BUT WHATE'ER EVIL GUISE YOU ASSUME, STILL SHALL YOU FALL BEFORE ROM--
--'TIL I LEARN THE TRUTH OF WHAT YOU HAVE DONE TO THE CHILD, SYBIL!
YOUR CONCERN FOR THE PATHETIC POPULACE OF THIS PITIFUL PLANET IS MOST TOUCHING, ROM!
HOW FITTING, THEN, THAT YOU SHALL DIE ON THIS WORLD YOU ARE PLEDGED TO DEFEND!
16

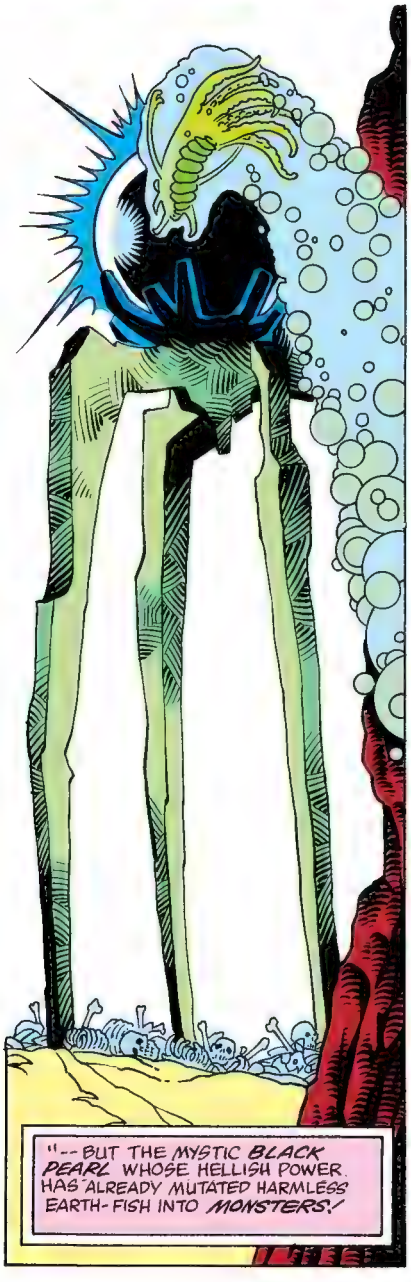
DIE, WRAITH? HALF OF ME HAS ALREADY PERISHED DURING THE COURSE OF MY WAR WITH YOU!
PREPARE THEN, TO LOSE YOUR OTHER HALF, SPACEKNIGHT!
ARRGH! MY ARM--CAUGHT FAST IN A VICE-LIKE MAW WHILST ANOTHER DREAD SEA-THING REACHES TOWARDS ME WITH TENDRILS TRAILING SEARING ACID!
TO BE FREE OF ONE, I MUST FIGHT THE OTHER!
SKRASH!
SKREEEEEE
NOW, WRAITH-HORROR--FEED ON ONE OF YOUR OWN!
GLUMPH!
BUT, EVEN AS THE SHINING SPACEKNIGHT TURNS TO FACE ANOTHER FOE...
TZZZZZTT
AGGH! KILLING CURRENT SEARING THROUGH MY CIR-CUITRY!
17

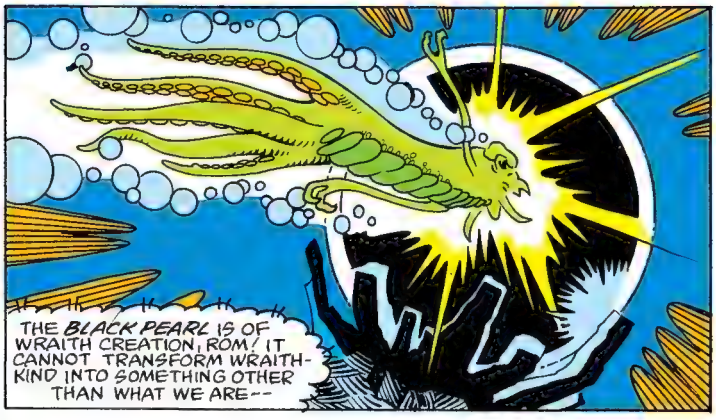

NOW, ROM, WHILE YOU STAND STUNNED, I WILL ENCASE YOU IN A COCOON HARDER THAN THE HARDEST CORAL--
--AND HERE YOU WILL STAND, A SPACEKNIGHT STATUE BENEATH AN ALIEN SEA!
SKRASH
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO OPPOSE YOU, WRAITH-SCUM?
IT MEANS HAVING THE WILL TO WAGE UNCEASING WAR AGAINST A RACE SO VILE ITS VERY EXISTENCE IS AN AFFRONT TO THE SHINING STARS!
TO WAGE SUCH A WAR IS MY DUTY--MY MOST FERVENT DESIRE!
WITH HALF MY HUMANITY GONE, COMBAT IS MY SOLE REASON FOR SURVIVING!
FEAR NOT, ROM--SOON YOU WILL KNOW PEACE AGAIN!
BY THE GOLDEN GATES OF GALADOR, TO THINK THAT I WAS ONCE A MAN OF PEACE!!
IN THAT SURCEASE FROM STRIFE FOUND BY ALL WHO DIE IN THE STYGIAN DARKNESS OF THE DREAD POISON SQUID!
NOW, WRAITH-BROTHERS, AS MY TOXIC INK STUNS THE CYBORG'S NEUROCIRCUITRY, LET US FINISH HIM BY FORCE OF NUMBERS!
18

WEARY OF WAR, OR PERHAPS SICKENED BY THE THOUGHT THAT IN WAGING WAR HE MAY HAVE ABANDONED SYBIL TO DROWN BENEATH THE WAVES, ROM SUCCUMBS TO THE WRAITH ONSLAUGHT.
HE DOES NOT RESIST, WRAITH-BROTHERS!
LET US SLAY THE SPACEKNIGHT NOW!
NO! NAMOR OF ATLANTIS HAS GIVEN HIS WORD THAT SYBIL'S SAVIOR SHALL NOT PERISH!
AND EVEN IF I HAD NOT--STILL I WOULD BE TRULY DESPICABLE WERE I TO LET ANY CREATURE FALL TO THE LIKES OF YOU!
I HAVE BEEN SAVED--BY A WATER-BREATHING INHABITANT OF EARTH POSSESSED OF SAVAGE STRENGTH--
--WHO PROPELS HIMSELF THROUGH THE DEPTHS ON WINGED ANKLES!
I AM NAMOR THE FIRST, PRINCE OF ATLANTIS--HE WHOM MEN CALL THE SAVAGE SUB-MARINER!
IN TRUTH, NEVER HAVE I FELT SO SAVAGE AS NOW WHEN I SEE MY KINGDOM'S MOST-SACRED SHRINE SULLIED--
--BY ALIENS OF AN ALMOST UNSPEAKABLE HORROR!
YES, WE ARE ALIEN TO YOUR PLANET, WATER-HUMAN--BUT SOON IT WILL BE YOUR KIND WHO ARE STRANGERS TO EARTH!
ONE DAY THIS ENTIRE WORLD WILL BELONG TO WRAITHKIND--TO SERVE AS A BASE TO LAUNCH OUR SECOND INVASION OF GALADOR!
19

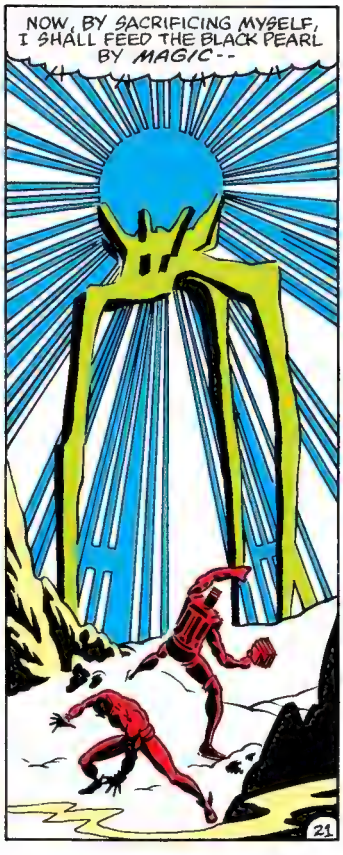

THE FIRST INVASION CAUSED ME TO LOSE HALF MY HUMANITY, AND THE WOMAN I LOVED!
WOULD YOU ALLOW THEM TO DESPOIL YOUR WORLD AS WELL, MAN OF EARTH?
I AM PRINCE OF ATLANTIS! I BEAR NO LOVE FOR THE SURFACE WORLD--
--YET I CAN SEE THAT THESE FOUL FIENDS WILL NOT STOP AT CONQUERING THOSE REALMS ABOVE THE WAVES!
AYE, THEY WOULD HAVE ALL OF EARTH!
BUT, BY THE GOLDEN GALAXY, MY NEUTRALIZER SHALL SEE TO IT THAT THEY POSSESS NONE OF IT!
VREEEE

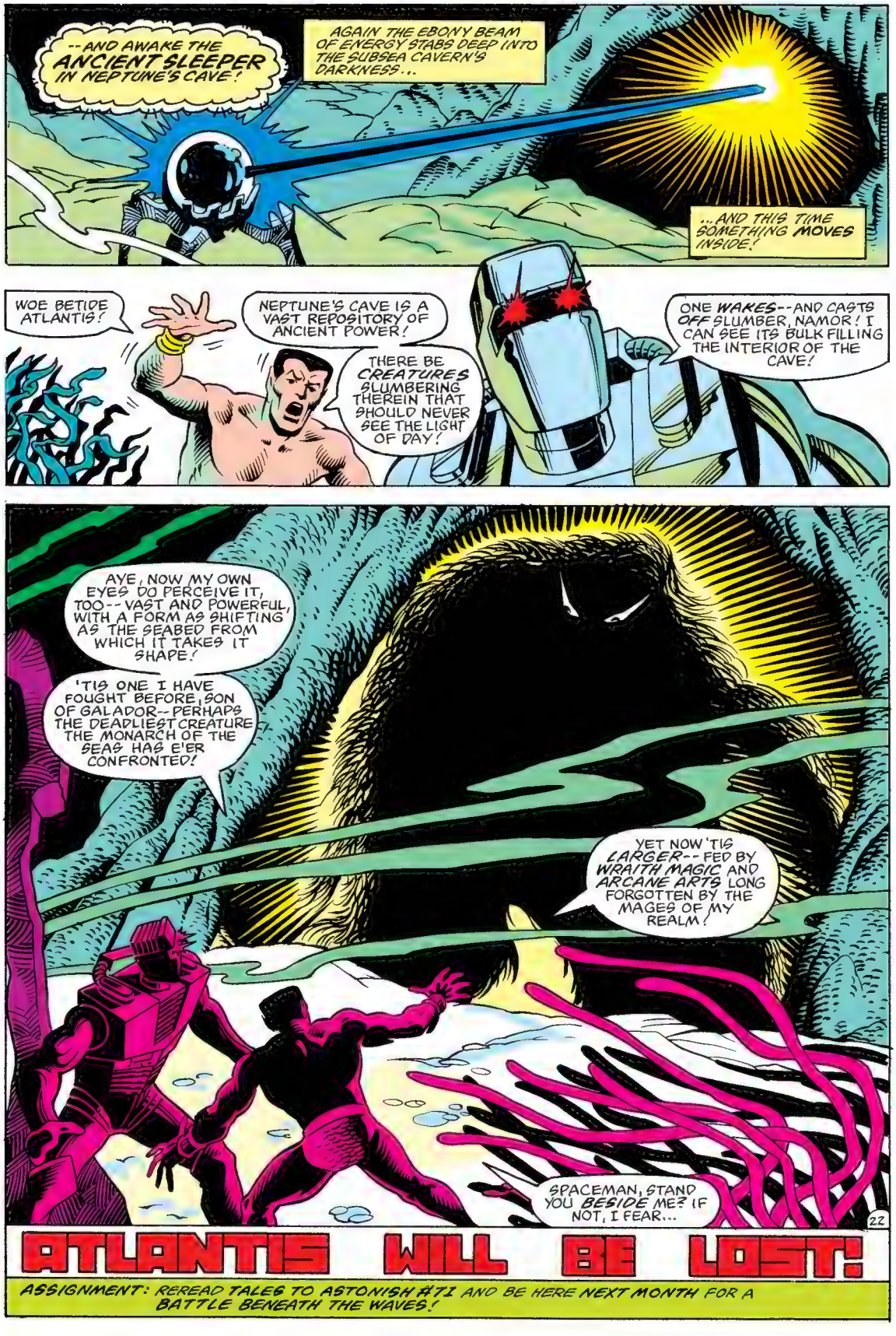

SON OF GALADOR, ANOTHER OF OUR ENEMIES SEEK TO ESCAPE OUR WRATH!
THE WRAITH HIGH WITCH-- DEADLIEST OF THE SWARM!
'TIS NOT ESCAPE SHE SEEKS, PRINCE OF THE SEAS--


"--BUT THE MYSTIC BLACK PEARL WHOSE HELLISH POWER HAS ALREADY MUTATED HARMLESS EARTH-FISH INTO MONSTERS!


THE BLACK PEARL IS OF WRAITH CREATION, ROM! IT CANNOT TRANSFORM WRAITH-KIND INTO SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHAT WE ARE--

--BUT IT CAN HORRIBLY TWIST EARTH ORGANISMS INTO MINDLESS INSTRUMENTS OF DESTRUCTION!
WE DETECTED ONE SUCH ORGANISM-- POSSESSED OF VAST MYSTICALLY-NURTURED MIGHT-- LYING DORMANT INSIDE NEPTUNE'S CAVE!


NOW, BY SACRIFICING MYSELF, I SHALL FEED THE BLACK PEARL BY MAGIC--
21


--AND AWAKE THE ANCIENT SLEEPER IN NEPTUNE'S CAVE!
AGAIN THE EBONY BEAM OF ENERGY STABS DEEP INTO THE SUBSEA CAVERN'S DARKNESS...
...AND THIS TIME SOMETHING MOVES INSIDE!
WOE BETIDE ATLANTIS!
NEPTUNE'S CAVE IS A VAST REPOSITORY OF ANCIENT POWER!
THERE BE CREATURES SLUMBERING THEREIN THAT SHOULD NEVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY!
ONE WAKES--AND CASTS OFF SLUMBER, NAMOR! I CAN SEE ITS BULK FILLING THE INTERIOR OF THE CAVE!
AYE, NOW MY OWN EYES DO PERCEIVE IT, TOO--VAST AND POWERFUL, WITH A FORM AS SHIFTING AS THE SEABED FROM WHICH IT TAKES IT SHAPE!
'TIS ONE I HAVE FOUGHT BEFORE, SON OF GALADOR--PERHAPS THE DEADLIEST CREATURE THE MONARCH OF THE SEAS HAS E'ER CONFRONTED!
YET NOW 'TIS LARGER--FED BY WRAITH MAGIC AND ARCANE ARTS LONG FORGOTTEN BY THE MAGES OF MY REALM!
SPACEMAN, STAND YOU BESIDE ME? IF NOT, I FEAR...
22
ATLANTIS WILL BE LOST!
ASSIGNMENT: REREAD TALES TO ASTONISH #71 AND BE HERE NEXT MONTH FOR A BATTLE BENEATH THE WAVES!

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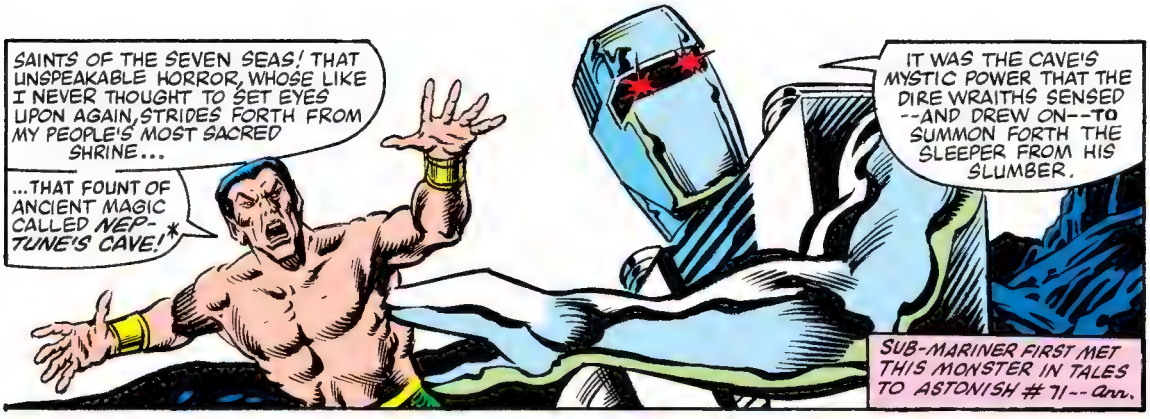
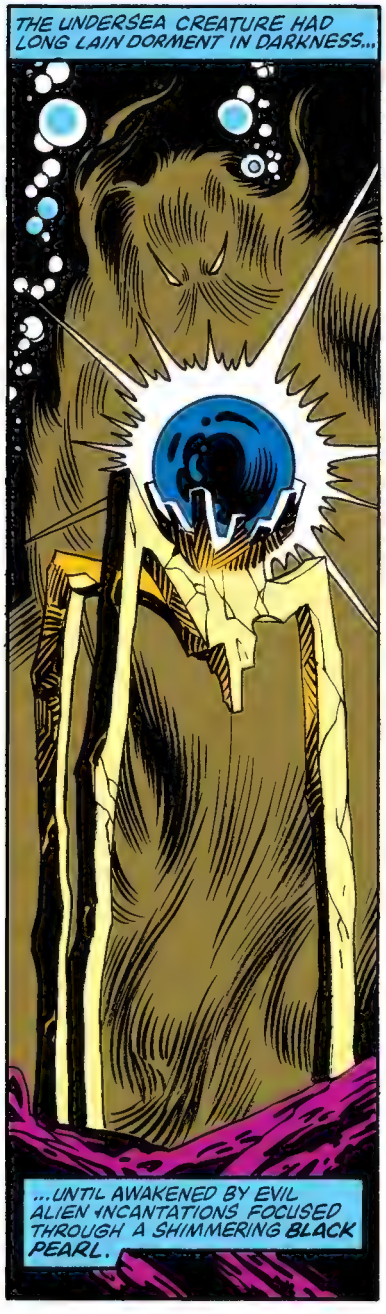
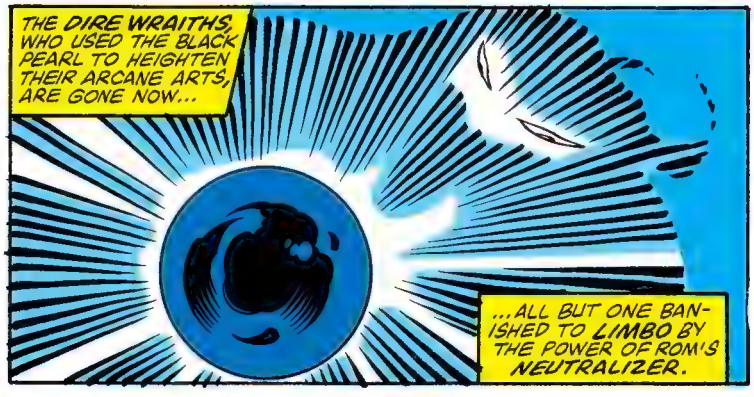
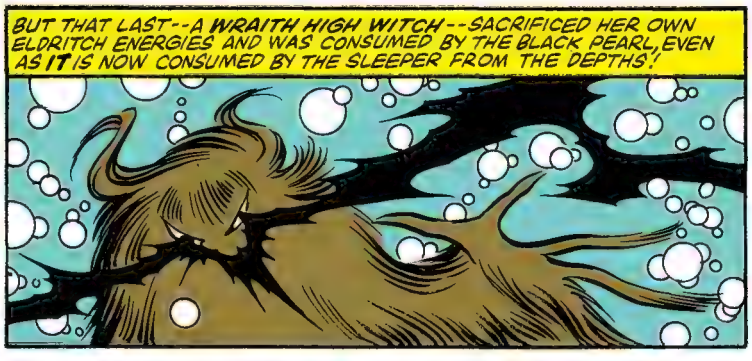
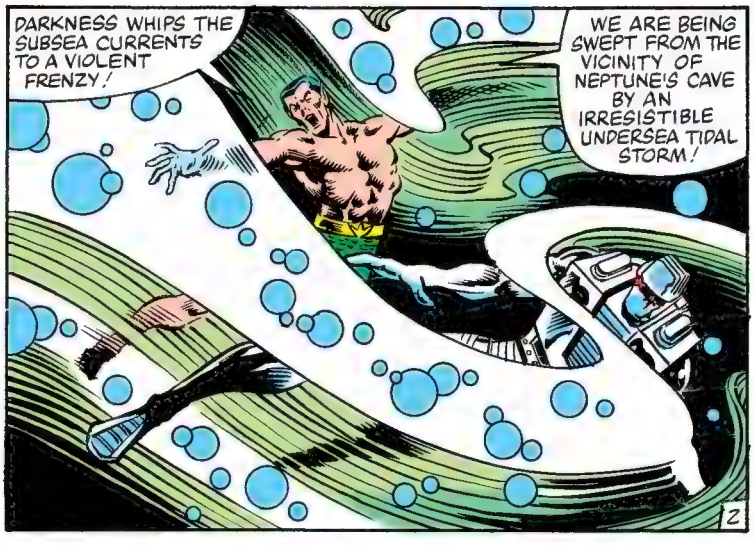
STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO WRITER / SAL BUSCEMA & DANNY BULANADI ARTISTS / NOVAK, LETTERS SEAN, COLORS / ANN NOCENTI EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER HIGH WRAITH
AGONY IN ATLANTIS!
MANY FATHOMS BELOW THE SEA, ROM, SPACEKNIGHT AND PRINCE NAMOR, THE SAVAGE SUB-MARINER, CONFRONT A THREAT OF DIRE WRAITH CONJURATION...
...WHICH, IF NOT CHECKED, COULD SPELL THE END OF THE UNDERSEA KINGDOM OF ATLANTIS AND OF THE SURFACE WORLD AS WELL!

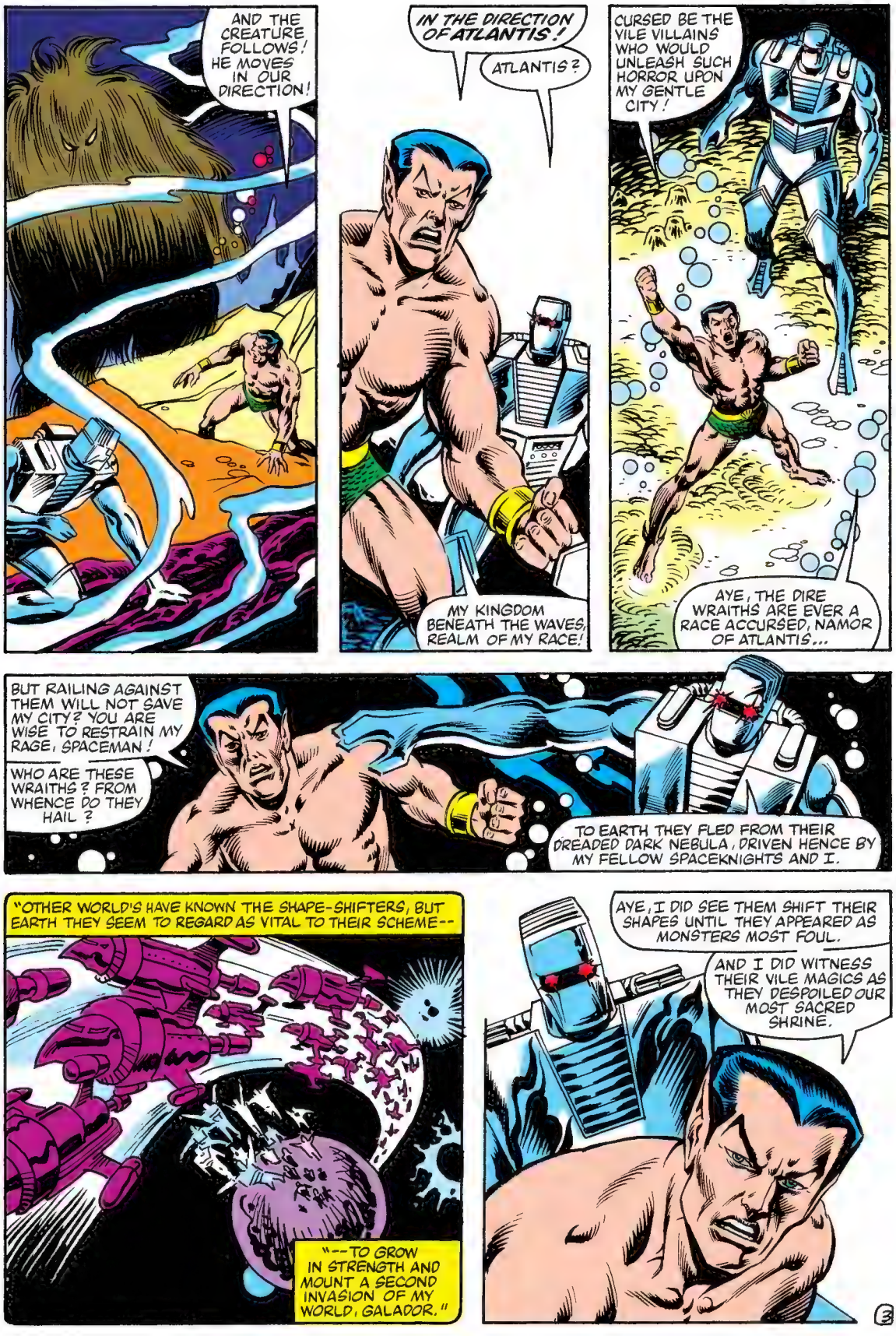

SAINTS OF THE SEVEN SEAS! THAT UNSPEAKABLE HORROR, WHOSE LIKE I NEVER THOUGHT TO SET EYES UPON AGAIN, STRIDES FORTH FROM MY PEOPLE'S MOST SACRED SHRINE...
...THAT FOUNT OF ANCIENT MAGIC CALLED NEPTUNE'S CAVE!*
IT WAS THE CAVE'S MYSTIC POWER THAT THE DIRE WRAITHS SENSED --AND DREW ON--TO SUMMON FORTH THE SLEEPER FROM HIS SLUMBER.
SUB-MARINER FIRST MET THIS MONSTER IN TALES TO ASTONISH # 71--Ann.

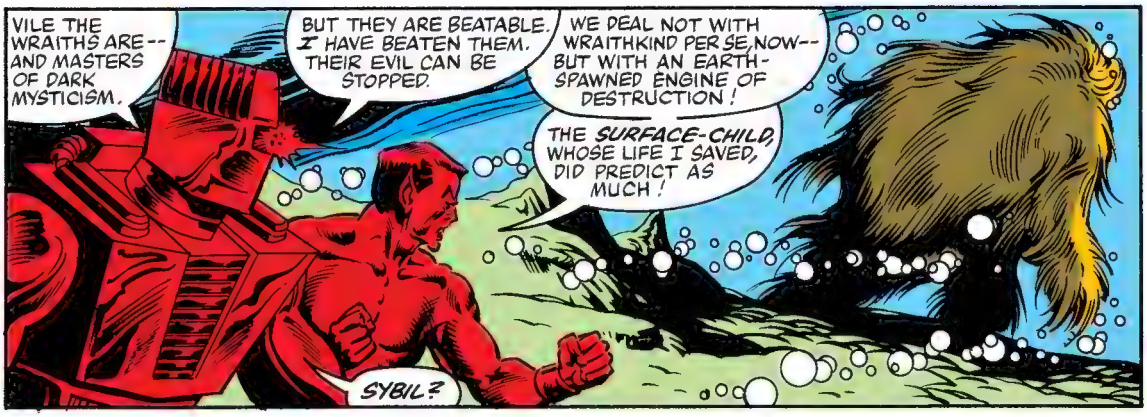

THE UNDERSEA CREATURE HAD LONG LAIN DORMENT IN DARKNESS...
...UNTIL AWAKENED BY EVIL ALIEN INCANTATIONS FOCUSED THROUGH A SHIMMERING BLACK PEARL.

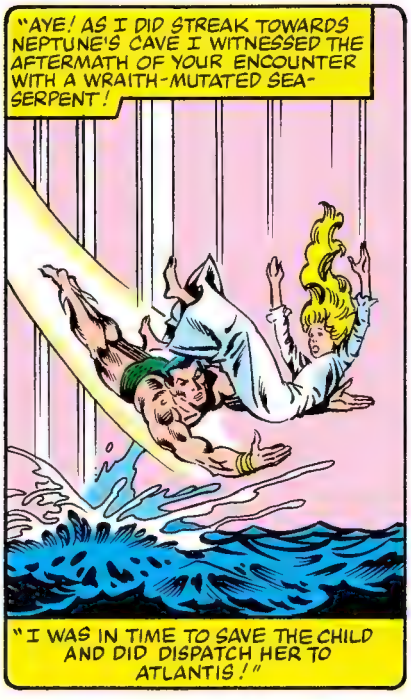

THE DIRE WRAITHS, WHO USED THE BLACK PEARL TO HEIGHTEN THEIR ARCANE ARTS, ARE GONE NOW...
...ALL BUT ONE BANISHED TO LIMBO BY THE POWER OF ROM'S NEUTRALIZER.

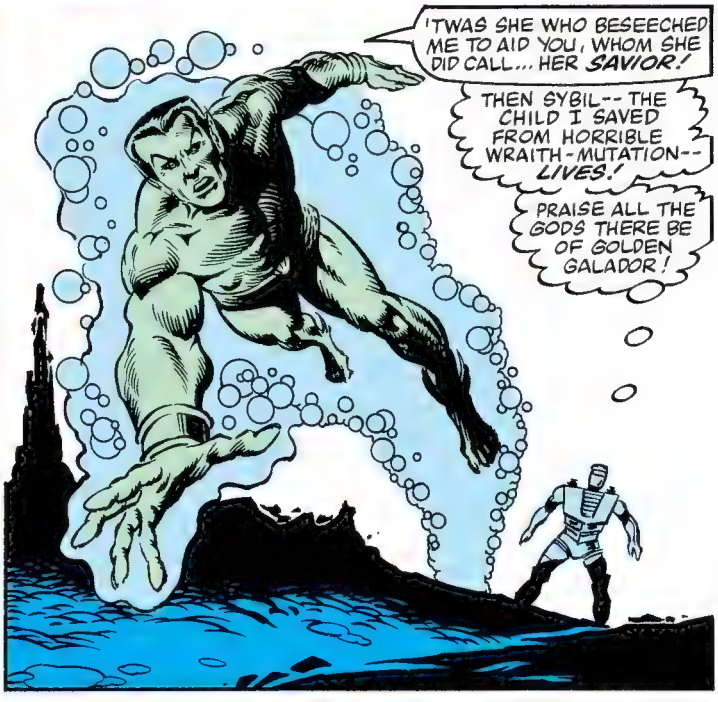

BUT THAT LAST--A WRAITH HIGH WITCH--SACRIFICED HER OWN ELDRITCH ENERGIES AND WAS CONSUMED BY THE BLACK PEARL, EVEN AS IT IS NOW CONSUMED BY THE SLEEPER FROM THE DEPTHS!

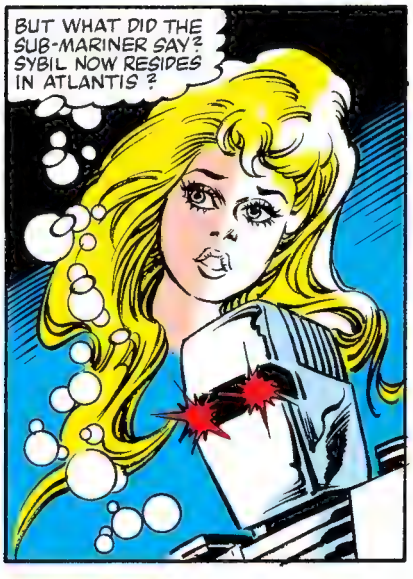

DARKNESS WHIPS THE SUBSEA CURRENTS TO A VIOLENT FRENZY!
WE ARE BEING SWEPT FROM THE VICINITY OF NEPTUNE'S CAVE BY AN IRRESISTIBLE UNDERSEA TIDAL STORM!
12


AND THE CREATURE FOLLOWS! HE MOVES IN OUR DIRECTION!
IN THE DIRECTION OF ATLANTIS!
ATLANTIS?
MY KINGDOM BENEATH THE WAVES, REALM OF MY RACE!
CURSED BE THE VILE VILLAINS WHO WOULD UNLEASH SUCH HORROR UPON MY GENTLE CITY!
AYE, THE DIRE WRAITHS ARE EVER A RACE ACCURSED, NAMOR OF ATLANTIS...
BUT RAILING AGAINST THEM WILL NOT SAVE MY CITY? YOU ARE WISE TO RESTRAIN MY RAGE, SPACEMAN!
WHO ARE THESE WRAITHS? FROM WHENCE DO THEY HAIL?
TO EARTH THEY FLED FROM THEIR DREADED DARK NEBULA, DRIVEN HENCE BY MY FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS AND I.
"OTHER WORLD'S HAVE KNOWN THE SHAPE-SHIFTERS, BUT EARTH THEY SEEM TO REGARD AS VITAL TO THEIR SCHEME--
"--TO GROW IN STRENGTH AND MOUNT A SECOND INVASION OF MY WORLD, GALADOR."
AYE, I DID SEE THEM SHIFT THEIR SHAPES UNTIL THEY APPEARED AS MONSTERS MOST FOUL.
AND I DID WITNESS THEIR VILE MAGICS AS THEY DESPOILED OUR MOST SACRED SHRINE.

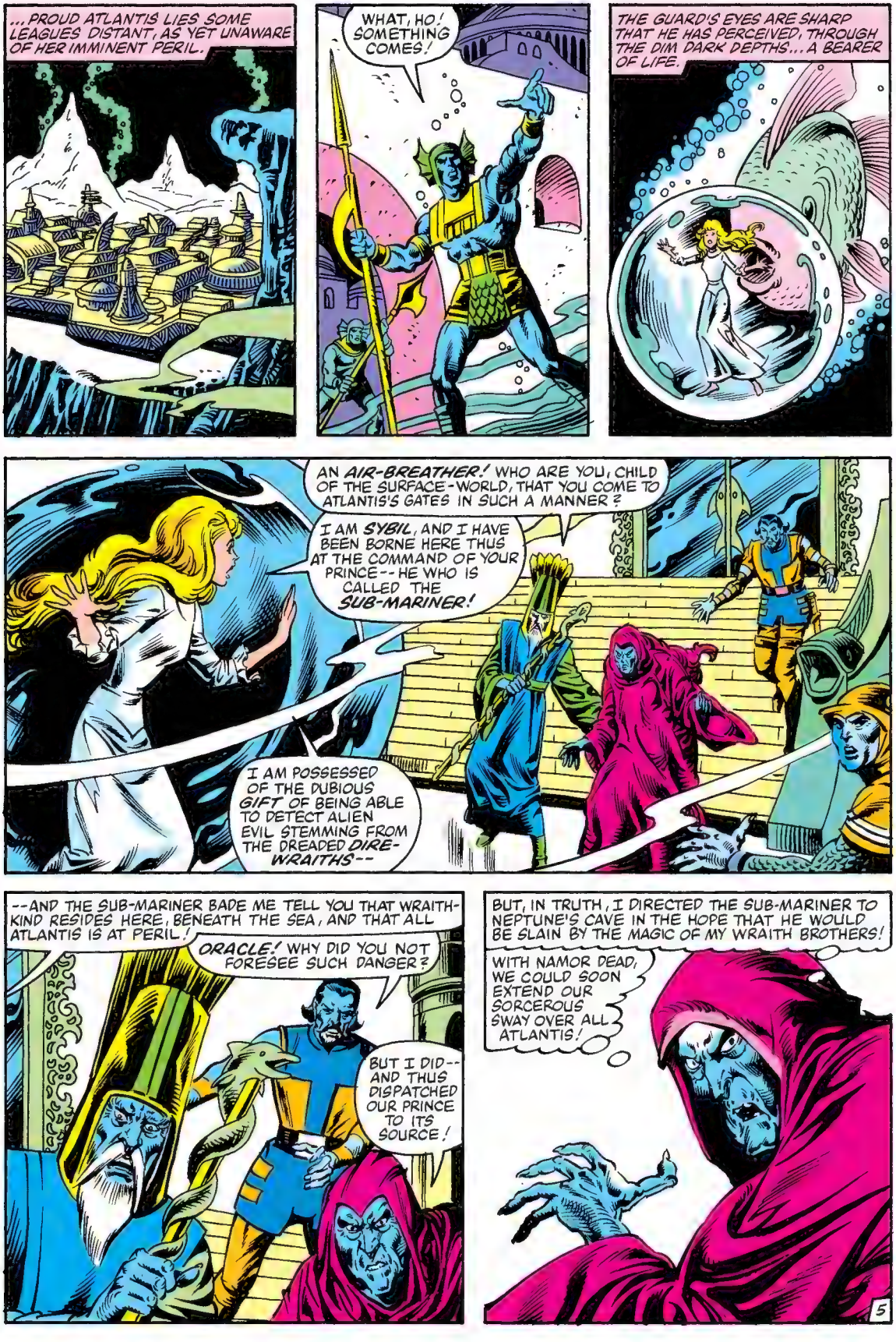

VILE THE WRAITHS ARE-- AND MASTERS OF DARK MYSTICISM.
BUT THEY ARE BEATABLE. I HAVE BEATEN THEM. THEIR EVIL CAN BE STOPPED.
WE DEAL NOT WITH WRAITHKIND PER SE, NOW-- BUT WITH AN EARTH-SPAWNED ENGINE OF DESTRUCTION!
THE SURFACE-CHILD, WHOSE LIFE I SAVED, DID PREDICT AS MUCH!
SYBIL?

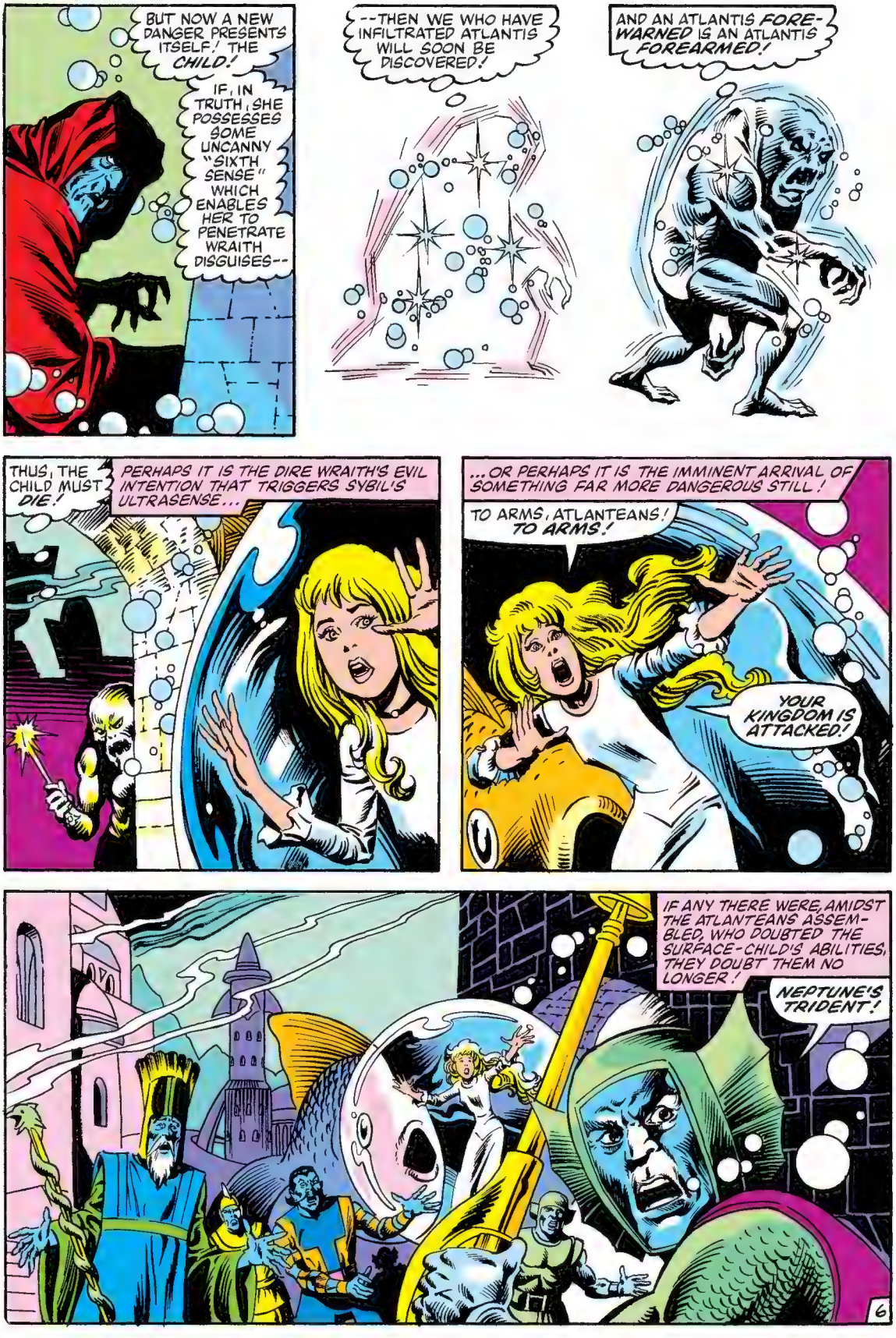

"AYE! AS I DID STREAK TOWARDS NEPTUNE'S CAVE I WITNESSED THE AFTERMATH OF YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH A WRAITH-MUTATED SEA-SERPENT!
"I WAS IN TIME TO SAVE THE CHILD AND DID DISPATCH HER TO ATLANTIS!"


'TWAS SHE WHO BESEECHED ME TO AID YOU, WHOM SHE DID CALL... HER SAVIOR!
THEN SYBIL-- THE CHILD I SAVED FROM HORRIBLE WRAITH-MUTATION-- LIVES!
PRAISE ALL THE GODS THERE BE OF GOLDEN GALADOR!


BUT WHAT DID THE SUB-MARINER SAY? SYBIL NOW RESIDES IN ATLANTIS?

AND 'TIS TOWARDS ATLANTIS THAT THE MONSTER DOES INEXORABLY DIRECT HIS LUMBERING STEPS!
I MUST FOLLOW IN THE WAKE OF PRINCE NAMOR, AND OFFER MY MIGHT IN DEFENSE OF HIS REALM!
AS A SPACE-KNIGHT I CAN DO NO LESS!
AS TWO TITANS WAGE A DESPERATE SUBSEA RACE...
4

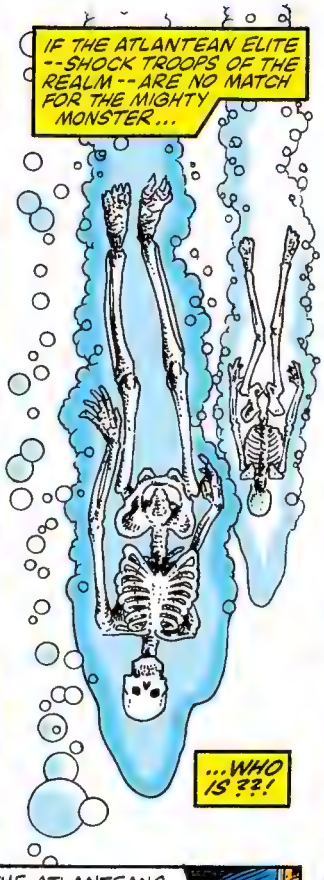

...PROUD ATLANTIS LIES SOME LEAGUES DISTANT, AS YET UNAWARE OF HER IMMINENT PERIL.
WHAT, HO! SOMETHING COMES!
THE GUARD'S EYES ARE SHARP THAT HE HAS PERCEIVED, THROUGH THE DIM DARK DEPTHS... A BEARER OF LIFE.
AN AIR-BREATHER! WHO ARE YOU, CHILD OF THE SURFACE-WORLD, THAT YOU COME TO ATLANTIS'S GATES IN SUCH A MANNER?
I AM SYBIL, AND I HAVE BEEN BORNE HERE THUS AT THE COMMAND OF YOUR PRINCE--HE WHO IS CALLED THE SUB-MARINER!
I AM POSSESSED OF THE DUBIOUS GIFT OF BEING ABLE TO DETECT ALIEN EVIL STEMMING FROM THE DREADED DIRE-WRAITHS--
--AND THE SUB-MARINER BADE ME TELL YOU THAT WRAITH-KIND RESIDES HERE, BENEATH THE SEA, AND THAT ALL ATLANTIS IS AT PERIL!
ORACLE! WHY DID YOU NOT FORESEE SUCH DANGER?
BUT I DID--AND THUS DISPATCHED OUR PRINCE TO ITS SOURCE!
BUT, IN TRUTH, I DIRECTED THE SUB-MARINER TO NEPTUNE'S CAVE IN THE HOPE THAT HE WOULD BE SLAIN BY THE MAGIC OF MY WRAITH BROTHERS!
WITH NAMOR DEAD, WE COULD SOON EXTEND OUR SORCEROUS SWAY OVER ALL ATLANTIS!
5


BUT NOW A NEW DANGER PRESENTS ITSELF! THE CHILD!
IF, IN TRUTH, SHE POSSESSES SOME UNCANNY "SIXTH SENSE" WHICH ENABLES HER TO PENETRATE WRAITH DISGUISES--
--THEN WE WHO HAVE INFILTRATED ATLANTIS WILL SOON BE DISCOVERED!
AND AN ATLANTIS FORE-WARNED IS AN ATLANTIS FOREARMED!
THUS, THE CHILD MUST DIE!
PERHAPS IT IS THE DIRE WRAITH'S EVIL INTENTION THAT TRIGGERS SYBIL'S ULTRASENSE...
...OR PERHAPS IT IS THE IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF SOMETHING FAR MORE DANGEROUS STILL!
TO ARMS, ATLANTEANS! TO ARMS!
YOUR KINGDOM IS ATTACKED!
IF ANY THERE WERE, AMIDST THE ATLANTEANS ASSEMBLED, WHO DOUBTED THE SURFACE-CHILD'S ABILITIES, THEY DOUBT THEM NO LONGER!
NEPTUNE'S TRIDENT!
6

"THERE IS A MONSTER AT THE GATES!"
7

IN THE SUB-MARINER'S ABSENCE, IT IS HIS CHOSEN VIZIER WHO HOLDS THE SCEPTER OF SOVEREIGNTY, AND ORDERS THE ATLANTEANS TO ARMS:
SUMMON EVERY AVAILABLE SOLDIER! RAISE THE GENERAL ALARM!
OUR DANGER IS GREAT, FOR IN TRUTH DO I RECOGNIZE THE CREATURE THAT ATTACKS FAIR ATLANTIS --
--AS THE SLEEPER FROM NEPTUNE'S CAVE!
THE LEGENDS SAY THAT, WHEN THAT AQUATIC ATROCITY AWAKES, ATLANTIS FALLS!
LET US PRAY THE LEGENDS ARE WRONG!
IN LESS TIME THAN IT TAKES TO TELL, THE ATLANTEAN PALACE IS ABANDONED, ALL HER SOLDIERY GONE FORTH TO CONFRONT THE FOE.
SYBIL STANDS ALONE WITHIN HER LIFE-SUSTAINING BUBBLE.
NO, NOT QUITE ALONE.
THERE IS ANOTHER DANGER HERE --ANOTHER DANGER NEAR!
YOUR SENSES ARE SHARP, INDEED, CHILD OF EARTH, THAT YOU PERCEIVE YOUR PERIL EVEN HERE, AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA!
A DIRE WRAITH!
YES, A DIRE WRAITH, HUMAN --AND YOUR DEATH!
SYBIL CRIES OUT FOR HELP, BUT THE ATLANTEANS ARE ALL TOO FAR AWAY TO HEAR...
MEANWHILE...
DID OUR PRINCE NOT ONCE BATTLE SUCH A CREATURE?
AYE-- AND EVEN THE SAVAGE SUB-MARINER BARELY SURVIVED!
HOW MUCH GREATER THE CREATURE APPEARS NOW!
WHERE IS NAMOR IN ATLANTIS'S HOUR OF NEED!?
8

JUST HOW GREAT THE ATLANTEANS' NEED OF THEIR LIEGE-LORD IS, EVEN THESE BRAVE WARRIORS DO NOT FATHOM...
...UNTIL TWIN BEAMS OF EERIE EBONY ENERGY STAB FORTH FROM THE SEAWEED CREATURE'S EYES!
EEYARGH!


IF THE ATLANTEAN ELITE --SHOCK TROOPS OF THE REALM--ARE NO MATCH FOR THE MIGHTY MONSTER...
...WHO IS ??!

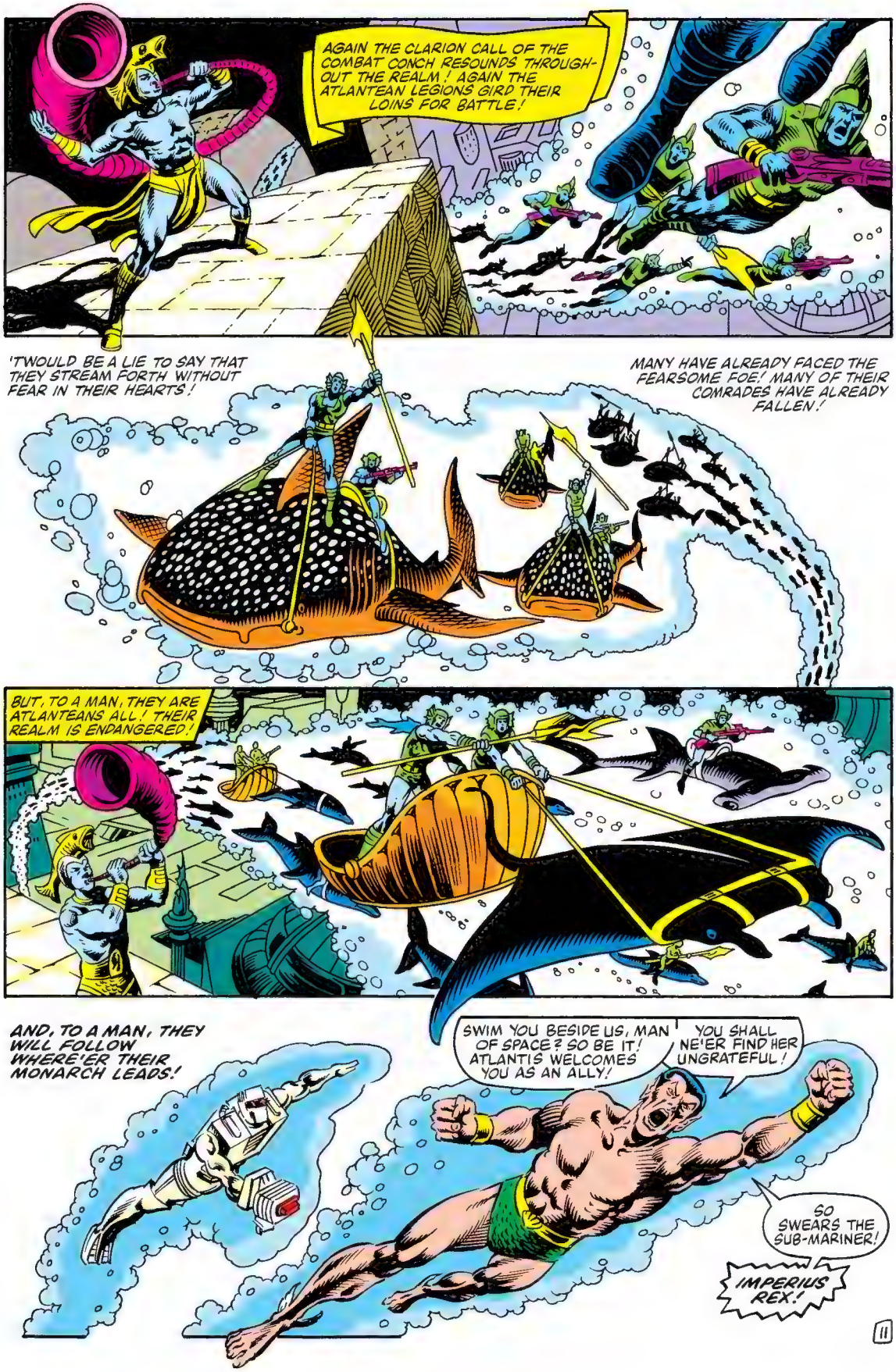
THE ANSWER, IT WOULD APPEAR, IS...NO ONE! THE CREATURE ADVANCES UNCHECKED!
NO! NO!
EEYAGH!
GOLDEN SPIRES TOPPLE LIKE CASTLES MADE OF SAND!

BUT, AMIDST THE CARNAGE, THERE ARE THOSE WHO THRILL AT THE DEVASTATION...WHO CHEER IT ON!
PLOTTERS AND CONSPIRATORS, THEY ARE TRAITOR ATLANTEANS AND THEIR ALIEN ALLIES...
...THE DIRE WRAITHS!
ALL THAT IS GOOD IN ATLANTIS LIES CRUSHED!

THE ATLANTEANS FIGHT BRAVELY--BUT DESPAIR THAT THEIR PRINCE, THE SUB-MARINER, HAS ALREADY FALLEN!
THAT DESPAIR SHALL BE THEIR UNDOING!
AND DEAD NAMOR MUST BE, SLAIN BY THE SEAWEED CREATURE--

"--ELSE HE WOULD BE HERE IN HIS KINGDOM'S HOUR OF NEED!"
9

THE DIRE WRAITH IS WRONG! IN FACT, THE SUB-MARINER IS HERE! PRINCE NAMOR IS HERE!
WOE BE IT UNTO THEY WHO HAVE WROUGHT SUCH DEVASTATION UPON FAIR ATLANTIS!
AND WITH HIM, ROM--GREATEST OF THE SPACE-KNIGHTS!
YOU, THOU HULKING HORROR, ARE BUT MINDLESS MACHINATION--A MAGIC-SPAWNED HANDSERVANT--
--DOING DIRE WRAITH EVIL!
AS YOU FALL, SO SHALL THEY!
WITHOUT WEAPONS--WITHOUT FEAR--NAMOR ATTACKS!
HOW REGAL IS THIS SUBSEA MONARCH!
AT THE SIGHT OF THE SUB-MARINER, THE BATTLE-WEARY ATLANTEANS RISE UP WITH RENEWED HOPE.
MAMA, LOOK!
'TIS PRINCE NAMOR! OUR LORD LIVES!
WHAT'S MORE--HE FIGHTS!
CAN WE DO ANY LESS, ATLANTEANS?!
NO! TO BATTLE! FOR ATLANTIS! FOR THE SUB-MARINER!
10


AGAIN THE CLARION CALL OF THE COMBAT CONCH RESOUNDS THROUGHOUT THE REALM! AGAIN THE ATLANTEAN LEGIONS GIRD THEIR LOINS FOR BATTLE!
'TWOULD BE A LIE TO SAY THAT THEY STREAM FORTH WITHOUT FEAR IN THEIR HEARTS!
MANY HAVE ALREADY FACED THE FEARSOME FOE! MANY OF THEIR COMRADES HAVE ALREADY FALLEN!
BUT, TO A MAN, THEY ARE ATLANTEANS ALL! THEIR REALM IS ENDANGERED!
AND, TO A MAN, THEY WILL FOLLOW WHERE'ER THEIR MONARCH LEADS!
SWIM YOU BESIDE US, MAN OF SPACE? SO BE IT! ATLANTIS WELCOMES YOU AS AN ALLY!
YOU SHALL NE'ER FIND HER UNGRATEFUL!
SO SWEARS THE SUB-MARINER!
IMPERIUS REX!
11

IN DAYS TO COME, TO GENERATIONS OF ATLANTEANS YET UNBORN, MINSTRELS WILL SING SAGAS OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE SEAWEED CREATURE!

THE TALES WILL GROW IN THE TELLING! BLUE-SKINNED CHILDREN WILL STARE WIDE-EYED, FOR THE CLASH WILL TAKE ON THE PROPORTIONS OF A MYTH!

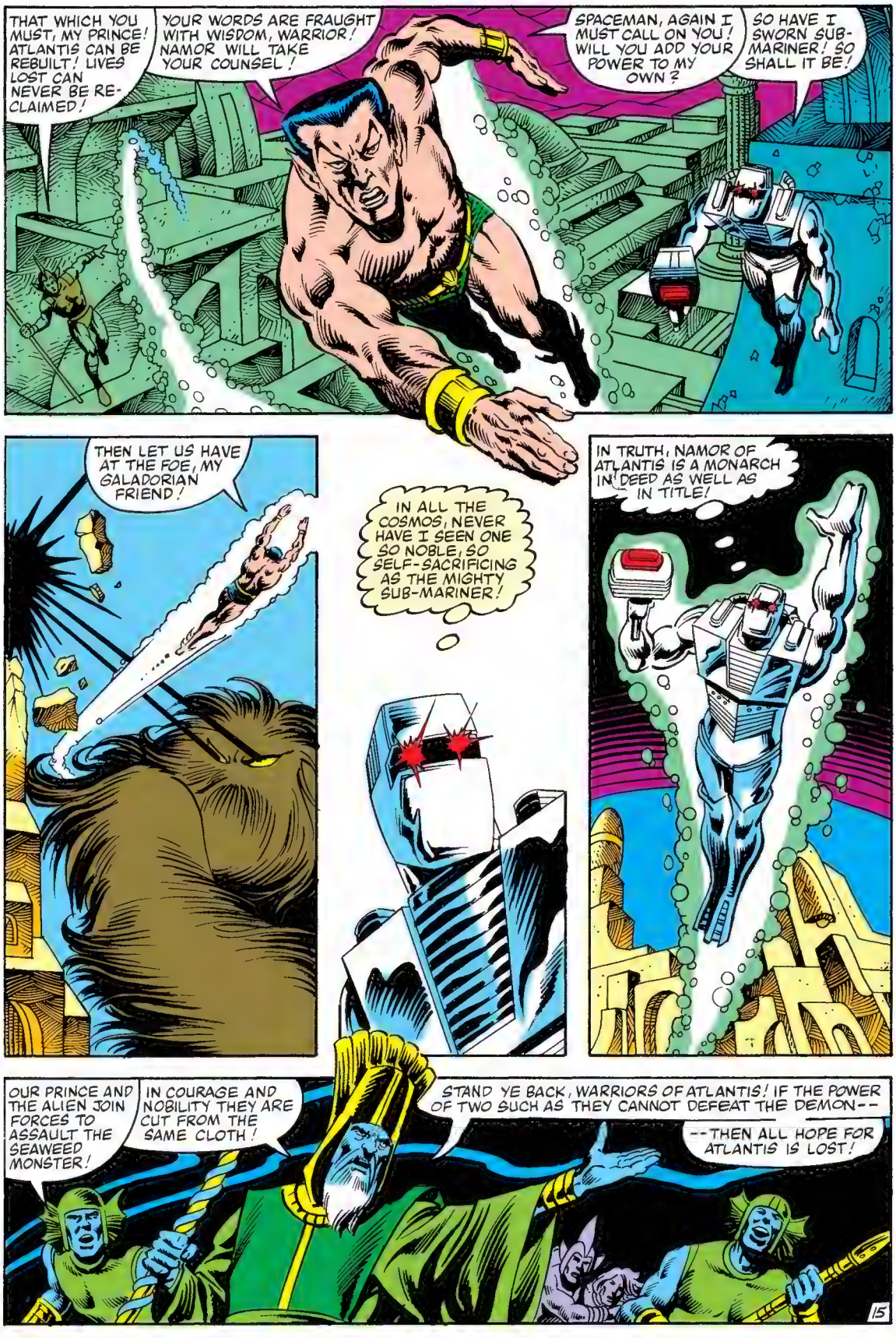
THEY WILL IMAGINE A MIGHTY ARMY, LED BY A MIGHTY PRINCE, 'GAINST A DEMON FROM THE DEPTHS!

12

AND THEY WILL BE TOLD THAT ALONGSIDE THEIR PRINCE AND THEIR PEOPLE FOUGHT A MAN FROM ANOTHER PLANET, WITH A WEAPON POWERED BY THE LIGHT OF DISTANT STARS!

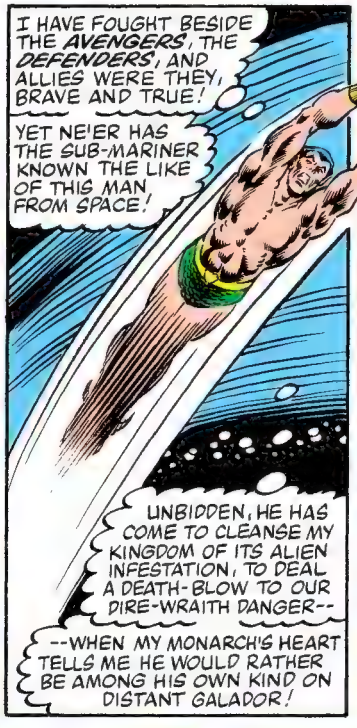
13

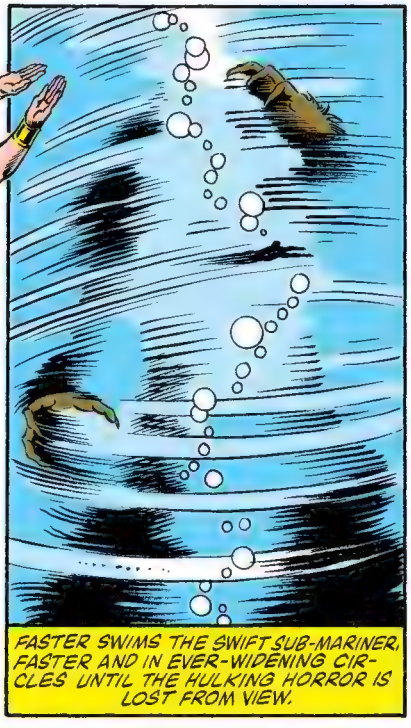
THE CHILDREN WILL TAKE TO THEIR BEDS DREAMING DREAMS OF GLORIOUS DAYS GONE BY, NEVER KNOWING THAT ALL THE TALES WERE TRUE!
YOUR WEAPON IS MIGHTY INDEED, ROM OF GALADOR! I HAVE SEEN IT BANISH WRAITH-KIND FROM THE OCEAN'S DEPTHS!
BUT IT HAS LITTLE EFFECT AGAINST THE SEAWEED DEMON!
YET MY NEUTRALIZER SHOULD UNDO THE EVIL WROUGHT BY DIRE WRAITH MAGIC!
"PERHAPS NOT, ROM, THIS HORROR WAS OLD WHEN THE EARTH WAS YOUNG! THE WRAITHS MERELY ENHANCED HIS MIGHT!
"EVEN I ONLY MANAGED TO SUBDUE HIM WHEN FIRST WE FOUGHT!"
A MAELSTROM BOUND THE BEAST?
AYE, BUT THE CREATURE WAS SMALLER THEN! A LARGER MAELSTROM HERE, TO COMPENSATE FOR HIS LARGER SIZE, COULD WREAK MORE HAVOC UPON ATLANTIS THAN THE HORROR HIMSELF CAUSES!
MY LIEGE! COUNTLESS CITIZENS FALL AS THE MONSTER ADVANCES! THEY CRY TO YOU FOR SUCCOR!
WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE YOUR MONARCH DO, WARRIOR?
14

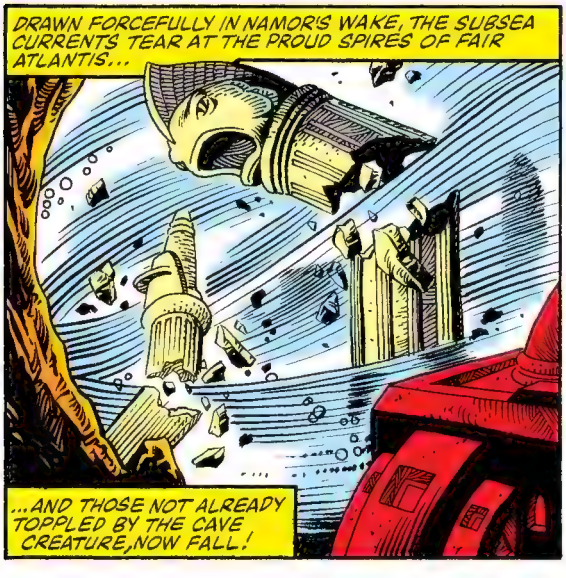

THAT WHICH YOU MUST, MY PRINCE! ATLANTIS CAN BE REBUILT! LIVES LOST CAN NEVER BE RECLAIMED!
YOUR WORDS ARE FRAUGHT WITH WISDOM, WARRIOR! NAMOR WILL TAKE YOUR COUNSEL!
SPACEMAN, AGAIN I MUST CALL ON YOU! WILL YOU ADD YOUR POWER TO MY OWN?
SO HAVE I SWORN SUB-MARINER! SO SHALL IT BE!
THEN LET US HAVE AT THE FOE, MY GALADORIAN FRIEND!
IN ALL THE COSMOS, NEVER HAVE I SEEN ONE SO NOBLE, SO SELF-SACRIFICING AS THE MIGHTY SUB-MARINER!
IN TRUTH, NAMOR OF ATLANTIS IS A MONARCH IN DEED AS WELL AS IN TITLE!
OUR PRINCE AND THE ALIEN JOIN FORCES TO ASSAULT THE SEAWEED MONSTER!
IN COURAGE AND NOBILITY THEY ARE CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH!
STAND YE BACK, WARRIORS OF ATLANTIS! IF THE POWER OF TWO SUCH AS THEY CANNOT DEFEAT THE DEMON--
--THEN ALL HOPE FOR ATLANTIS IS LOST!
15

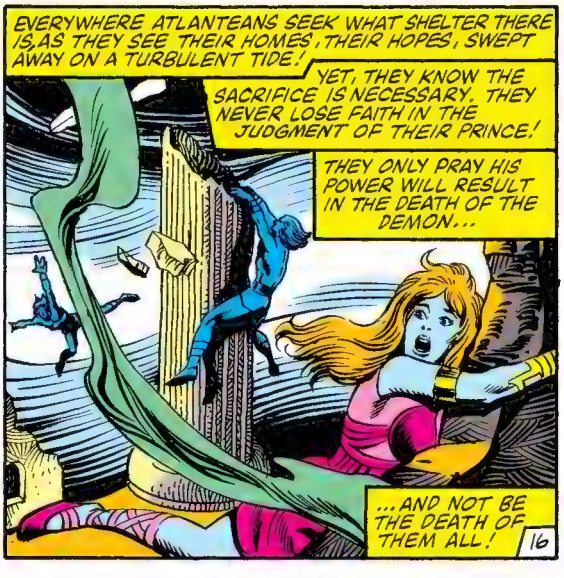
THE TIME HAS COME, ROM OF GALADOR, TO RISK ALL. STAND YOU READY?
UNLEASH YOUR WHIRLPOOL, NAMOR OF ATLANTIS! SURROUND THE SEAWEED CREATURE IN THE MAELSTROM'S MAW!

TRUST IN ME TO NEUTRALIZE THE MONSTER'S EBONY EYE-BEAMS WHILE YOU DO!

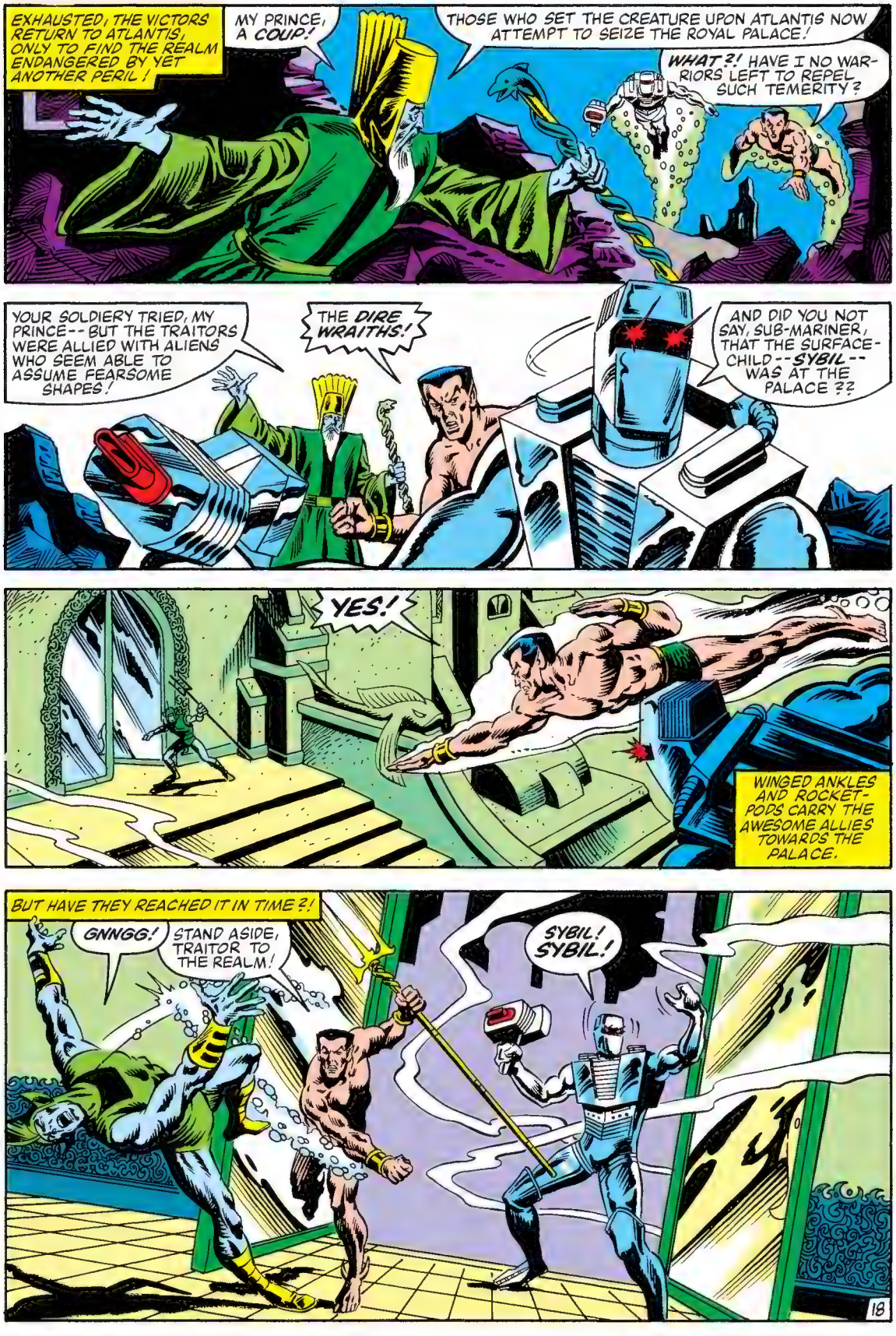

I HAVE FOUGHT BESIDE THE AVENGERS, THE DEFENDERS, AND ALLIES WERE THEY, BRAVE AND TRUE!
YET NE'ER HAS THE SUB-MARINER KNOWN THE LIKE OF THIS MAN FROM SPACE!
UNBIDDEN, HE HAS COME TO CLEANSE MY KINGDOM OF ITS ALIEN INFESTATION, TO DEAL A DEATH-BLOW TO OUR DIRE-WRAITH DANGER--
--WHEN MY MONARCH'S HEART TELLS ME HE WOULD RATHER BE AMONG HIS OWN KIND ON DISTANT GALADOR!

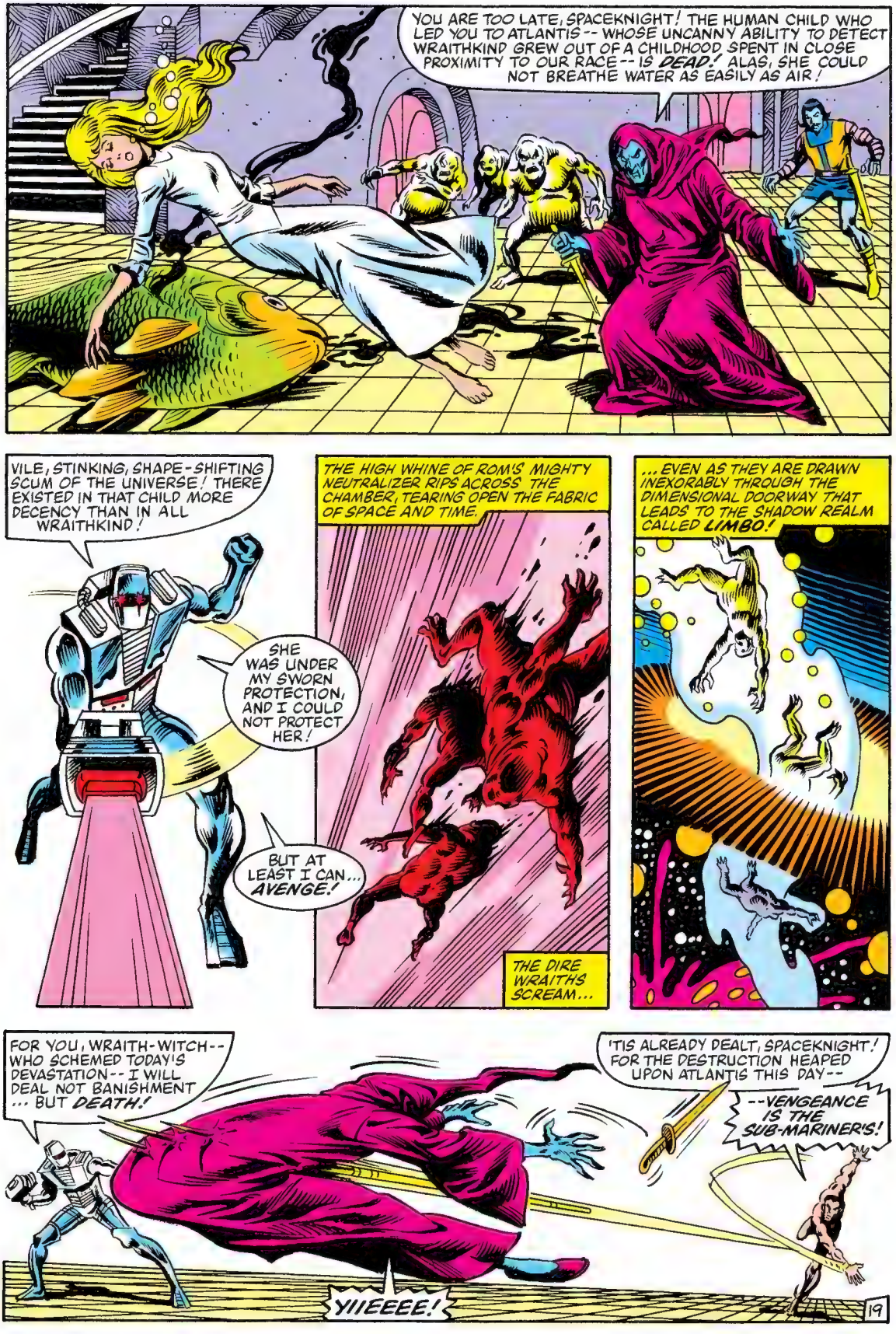

FASTER SWIMS THE SWIFT SUB-MARINER, FASTER AND IN EVER-WIDENING CIRCLES UNTIL THE HULKING HORROR IS LOST FROM VIEW.

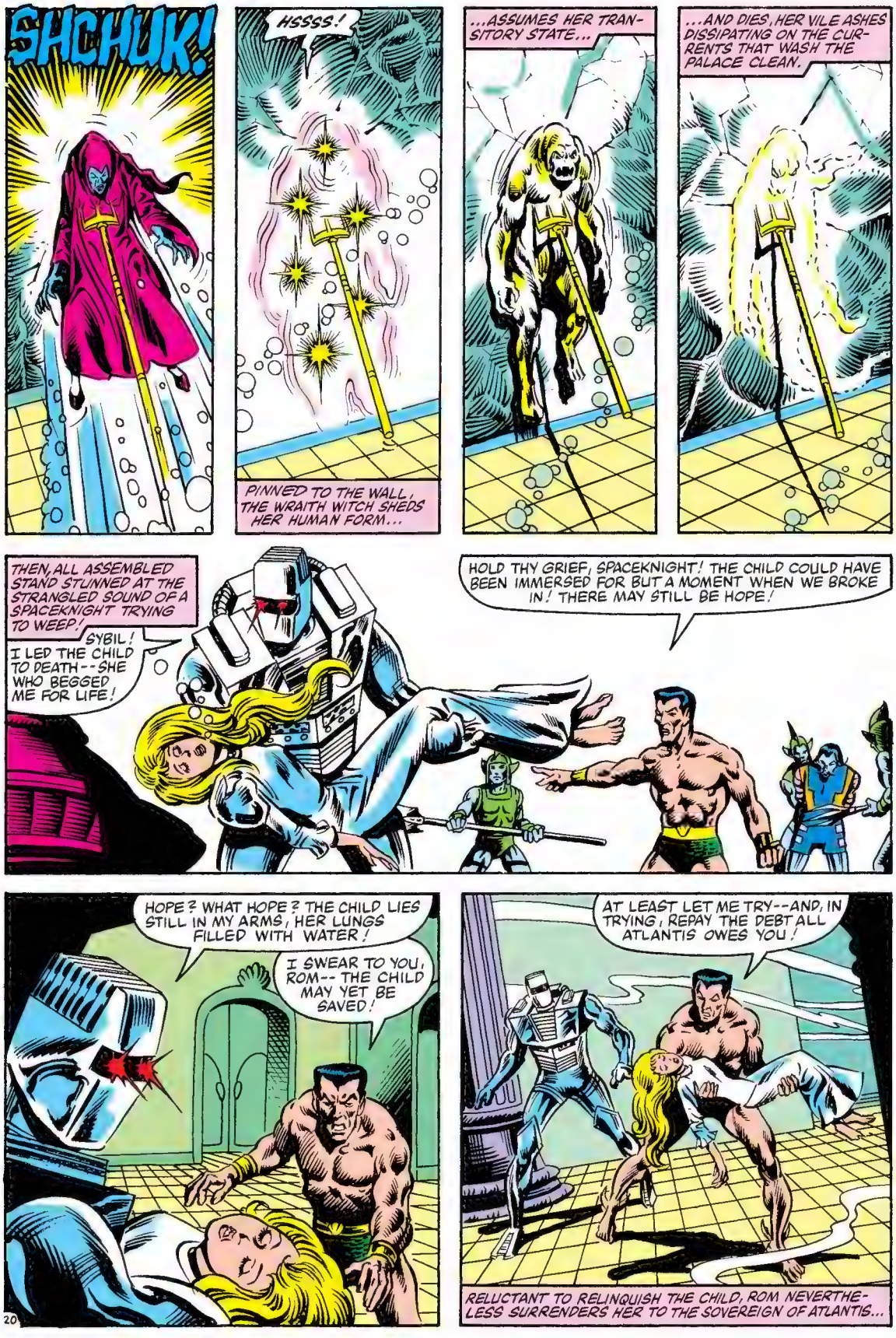

DRAWN FORCEFULLY IN NAMOR'S WAKE, THE SUBSEA CURRENTS TEAR AT THE PROUD SPIRES OF FAIR ATLANTIS...
...AND THOSE NOT ALREADY TOPPLED BY THE CAVE CREATURE, NOW FALL!

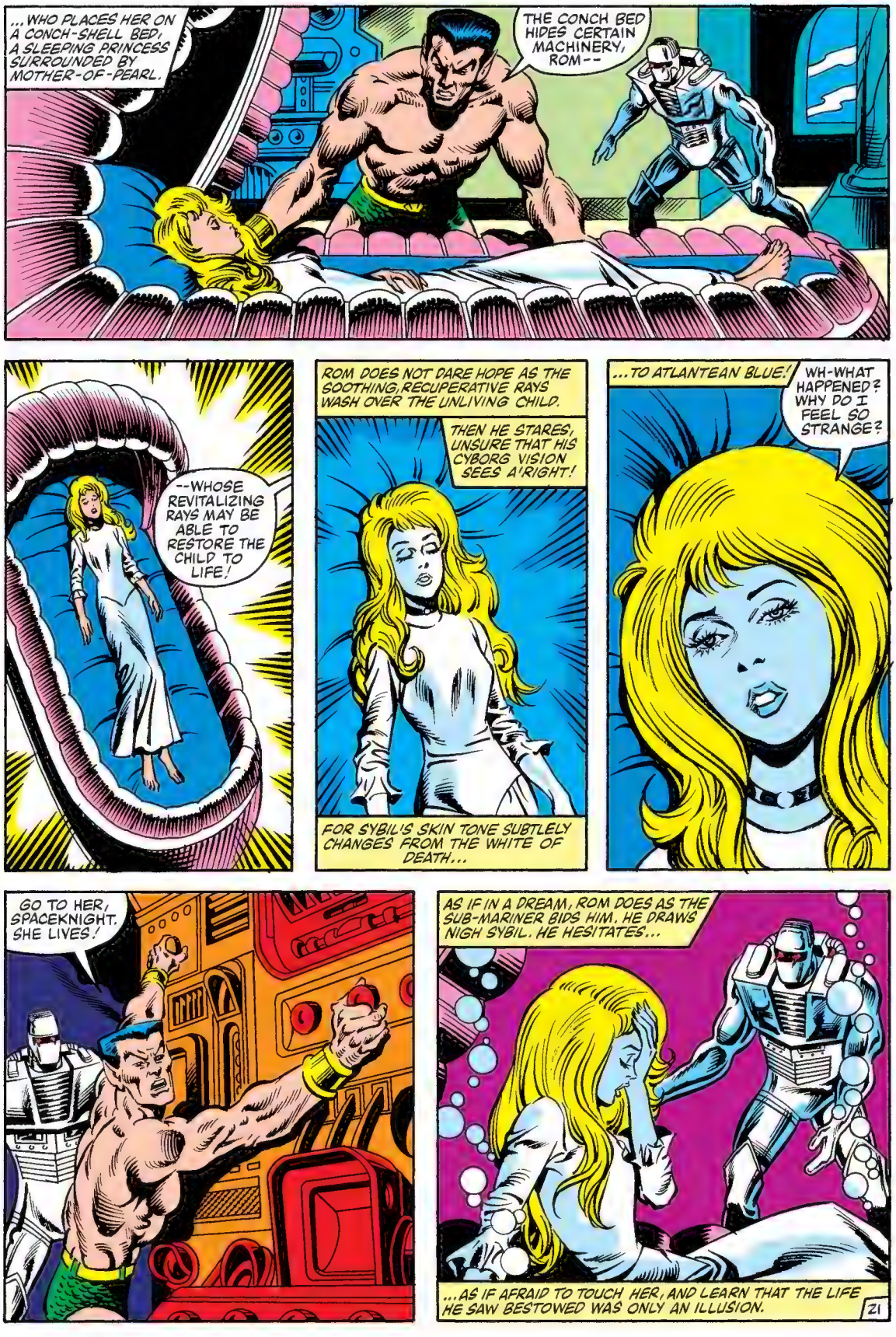

EVERYWHERE ATLANTEANS SEEK WHAT SHELTER THERE IS, AS THEY SEE THEIR HOMES, THEIR HOPES, SWEPT AWAY ON A TURBULENT TIDE!
YET, THEY KNOW THE SACRIFICE IS NECESSARY. THEY NEVER LOSE FAITH IN THE JUDGMENT OF THEIR PRINCE!
THEY ONLY PRAY HIS POWER WILL RESULT IN THE DEATH OF THE DEMON...
...AND NOT BE THE DEATH OF THEM ALL!
16

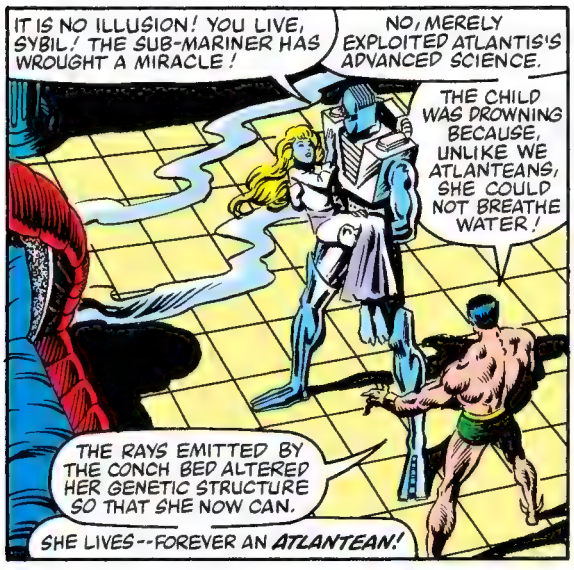
YARRGHH!
THE SEAWEED MONSTER'S EBONY EYEBEAMS HAVE STRUCK THE SPACEKNIGHT! HE IS IN AGONY!
IF HE FALLS, THAT EBONY ENERGY WILL BE TURNED UPON ME!
STAND, ROM! SLOUGH OFF THE PAIN! I DARE NOT DESIST, FOR EVEN NOW MY MAELSTROM REACHES ITS GREATEST FRENZY!
AS IF TAKING COURAGE FROM THE SUB-MARINER'S UNSPOKEN ADMONITION, ROM RESISTS THE SEARING ASSAULT ON HIS CYBORG CIRCUITRY!
FOUL CREATURE! THOUGH OF EARTH YOU BE, YOUR EYEBEAMS SMACK OF WRAITH MAGIC!
AND THERE EXISTS NOTHING WROUGHT BY WRAITHKIND THAT GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON CANNOT NEUTRALIZE!
VREEEET
THE NEUTRALIZER'S BEAM CAUGHT THE CREATURE RIGHT BETWIXT THE EYES! NOW, WHILST HE HOWLS IN MORTAL PAIN, I MUST INCREASE THE VORTEX--
--AND LET THE MAELSTROM WHIRL THIS SLIME FROM NEPTUNE'S CAVE TO SHREDS!
IN TRUTH, THE COMBINED MIGHT OF ROM OF GALADOR AND NAMOR OF ATLANTIS DOES DEFEAT THE CREATURE... AND A RAIN OF HARMLESS SEAWEED SHOWERS DOWN UPON THE GOLDEN REALM...
...ALL THAT IS LEFT OF WRAITH ENCHANTMENT!
17

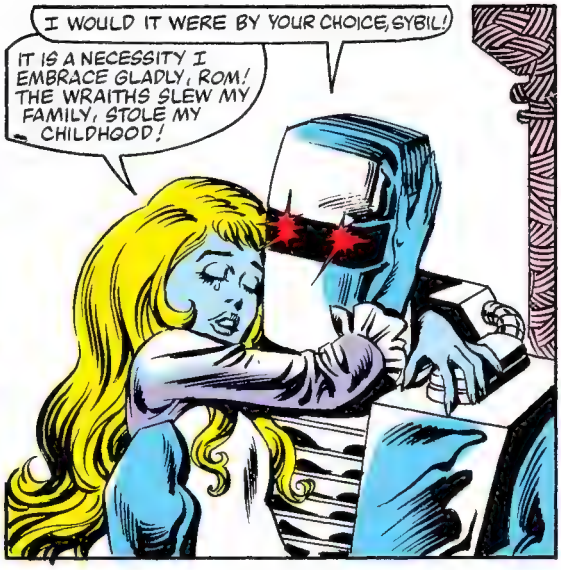

EXHAUSTED, THE VICTORS RETURN TO ATLANTIS, ONLY TO FIND THE REALM ENDANGERED BY YET ANOTHER PERIL!
MY PRINCE, A COUP!
THOSE WHO SET THE CREATURE UPON ATLANTIS NOW ATTEMPT TO SEIZE THE ROYAL PALACE!
WHAT?! HAVE I NO WARRIORS LEFT TO REPEL SUCH TEMERITY?
YOUR SOLDIERY TRIED, MY PRINCE--BUT THE TRAITORS WERE ALLIED WITH ALIENS WHO SEEM ABLE TO ASSUME FEARSOME SHAPES!
THE DIRE WRAITHS!
AND DID YOU NOT SAY, SUB-MARINER, THAT THE SURFACE-CHILD--SYBIL--WAS AT THE PALACE??
YES!
WINGED ANKLES AND ROCKET-PODS CARRY THE AWESOME ALLIES TOWARDS THE PALACE.
BUT HAVE THEY REACHED IT IN TIME?!
GNNGG!
STAND ASIDE, TRAITOR TO THE REALM!
SYBIL! SYBIL!
18

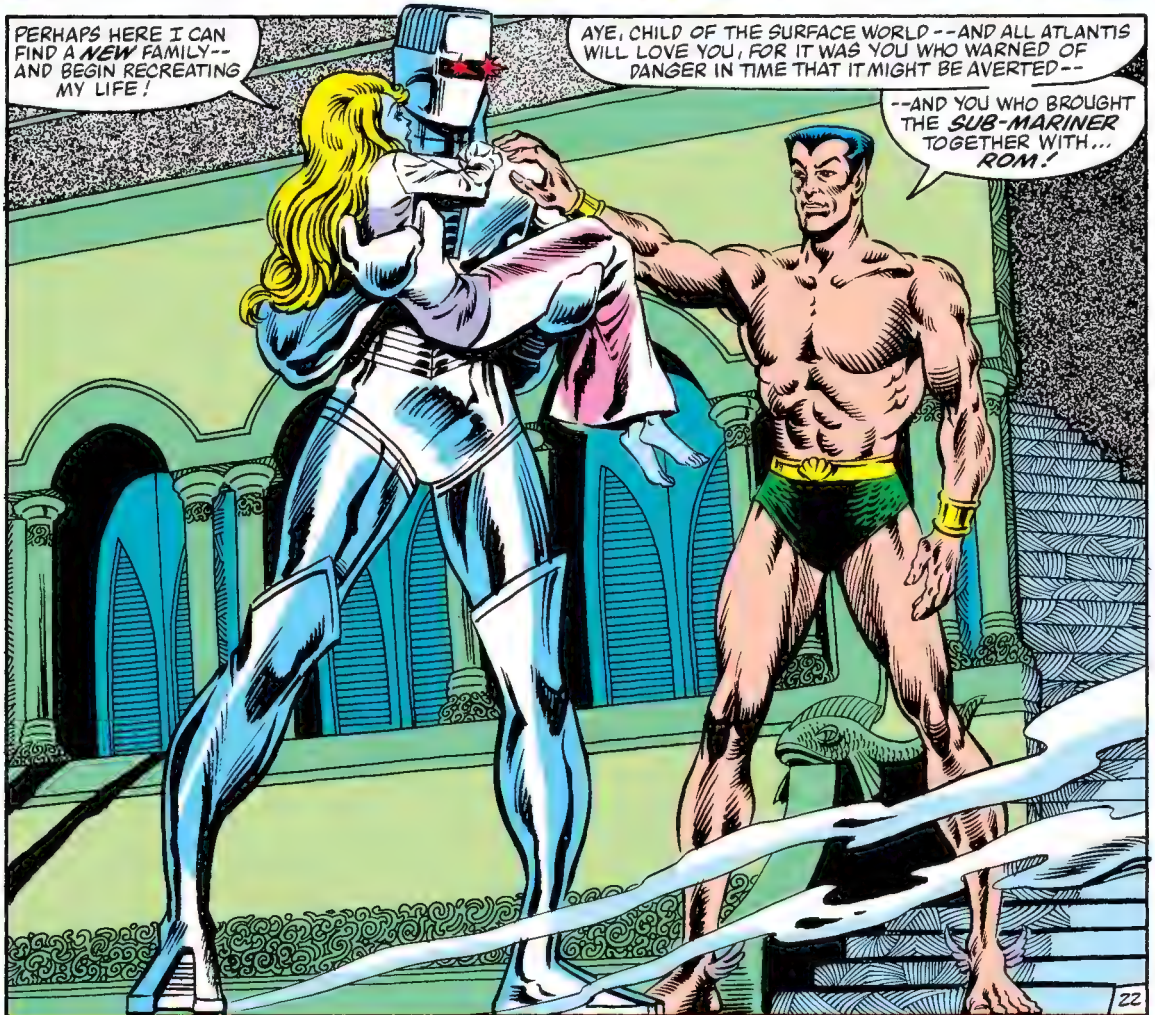

YOU ARE TOO LATE, SPACEKNIGHT! THE HUMAN CHILD WHO LED YOU TO ATLANTIS -- WHOSE UNCANNY ABILITY TO DETECT WRAITHKIND GREW OUT OF A CHILDHOOD SPENT IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO OUR RACE -- IS DEAD! ALAS, SHE COULD NOT BREATHE WATER AS EASILY AS AIR!
VILE, STINKING, SHAPE-SHIFTING SCUM OF THE UNIVERSE! THERE EXISTED IN THAT CHILD MORE DECENCY THAN IN ALL WRAITHKIND!
SHE WAS UNDER MY SWORN PROTECTION, AND I COULD NOT PROTECT HER!
BUT AT LEAST I CAN... AVENGE!
THE HIGH WHINE OF ROM'S MIGHTY NEUTRALIZER RIPS ACROSS THE CHAMBER, TEARING OPEN THE FABRIC OF SPACE AND TIME.
THE DIRE WRAITHS SCREAM...
...EVEN AS THEY ARE DRAWN INEXORABLY THROUGH THE DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY THAT LEADS TO THE SHADOW REALM CALLED LIMBO!
FOR YOU, WRAITH-WITCH -- WHO SCHEMED TODAY'S DEVASTATION -- I WILL DEAL NOT BANISHMENT ... BUT DEATH!
'TIS ALREADY DEALT, SPACEKNIGHT! FOR THE DESTRUCTION HEAPED UPON ATLANTIS THIS DAY --
--VENGEANCE IS THE SUB-MARINER'S!
YIIEEEE!
19


SHCHUK!
HSSSS!
PINNED TO THE WALL, THE WRAITH WITCH SHEDS HER HUMAN FORM...
...ASSUMES HER TRANSITORY STATE...
...AND DIES, HER VILE ASHES DISSIPATING ON THE CURRENTS THAT WASH THE PALACE CLEAN.
THEN, ALL ASSEMBLED STAND STUNNED AT THE STRANGLED SOUND OF A SPACEKNIGHT TRYING TO WEEP!
SYBIL! I LED THE CHILD TO DEATH--SHE WHO BEGGED ME FOR LIFE!
HOLD THY GRIEF, SPACEKNIGHT! THE CHILD COULD HAVE BEEN IMMERSED FOR BUT A MOMENT WHEN WE BROKE IN! THERE MAY STILL BE HOPE!
HOPE? WHAT HOPE? THE CHILD LIES STILL IN MY ARMS, HER LUNGS FILLED WITH WATER!
I SWEAR TO YOU, ROM-- THE CHILD MAY YET BE SAVED!
AT LEAST LET ME TRY--AND, IN TRYING, REPAY THE DEBT ALL ATLANTIS OWES YOU!
RELUCTANT TO RELINQUISH THE CHILD, ROM NEVERTHELESS SURRENDERS HER TO THE SOVEREIGN OF ATLANTIS...
20

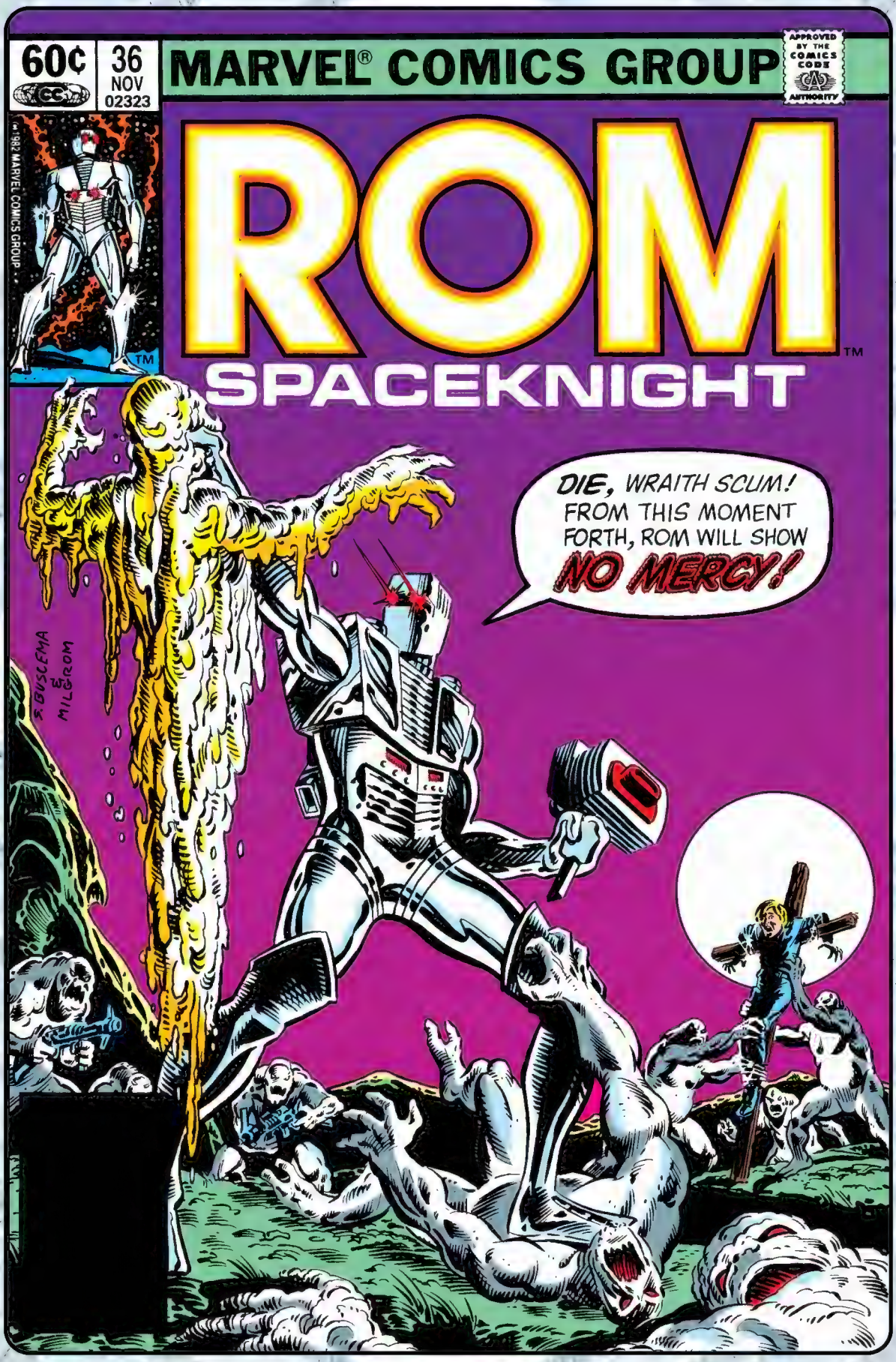

...WHO PLACES HER ON A CONCH-SHELL BED, A SLEEPING PRINCESS SURROUNDED BY MOTHER-OF-PEARL.
THE CONCH BED HIDES CERTAIN MACHINERY, ROM--
--WHOSE REVITALIZING RAYS MAY BE ABLE TO RESTORE THE CHILD TO LIFE!
ROM DOES NOT DARE HOPE AS THE SOOTHING, RECUPERATIVE RAYS WASH OVER THE UNLIVING CHILD.
THEN HE STARES, UNSURE THAT HIS CYBORG VISION SEES A'RIGHT!
FOR SYBIL'S SKIN TONE SUBTLELY CHANGES FROM THE WHITE OF DEATH...
...TO ATLANTEAN BLUE!
WH-WHAT HAPPENED? WHY DO I FEEL SO STRANGE?
GO TO HER, SPACEKNIGHT. SHE LIVES!
AS IF IN A DREAM, ROM DOES AS THE SUB-MARINER BIDS HIM. HE DRAWS NIGH SYBIL. HE HESITATES...
...AS IF AFRAID TO TOUCH HER, AND LEARN THAT THE LIFE HE SAW BESTOWED WAS ONLY AN ILLUSION.
21


IT IS NO ILLUSION! YOU LIVE, SYBIL! THE SUB-MARINER HAS WROUGHT A MIRACLE!
NO, MERELY EXPLOITED ATLANTIS'S ADVANCED SCIENCE.
THE CHILD WAS DROWNING BECAUSE, UNLIKE WE ATLANTEANS, SHE COULD NOT BREATHE WATER!
THE RAYS EMITTED BY THE CONCH BED ALTERED HER GENETIC STRUCTURE SO THAT SHE NOW CAN.
SHE LIVES--FOREVER AN ATLANTEAN!


I WOULD IT WERE BY YOUR CHOICE, SYBIL!
IT IS A NECESSITY I EMBRACE GLADLY, ROM! THE WRAITHS SLEW MY FAMILY, STOLE MY CHILDHOOD!


PERHAPS HERE I CAN FIND A NEW FAMILY-- AND BEGIN RECREATING MY LIFE!
AYE, CHILD OF THE SURFACE WORLD--AND ALL ATLANTIS WILL LOVE YOU, FOR IT WAS YOU WHO WARNED OF DANGER IN TIME THAT IT MIGHT BE AVERTED--
--AND YOU WHO BROUGHT THE SUB-MARINER TOGETHER WITH... ROM!
22

NEXT MONTH:
WRAITH MAGIC IN MERRY OLDE ENGLANDE!
SCARECROW!
DON'T MISS IT!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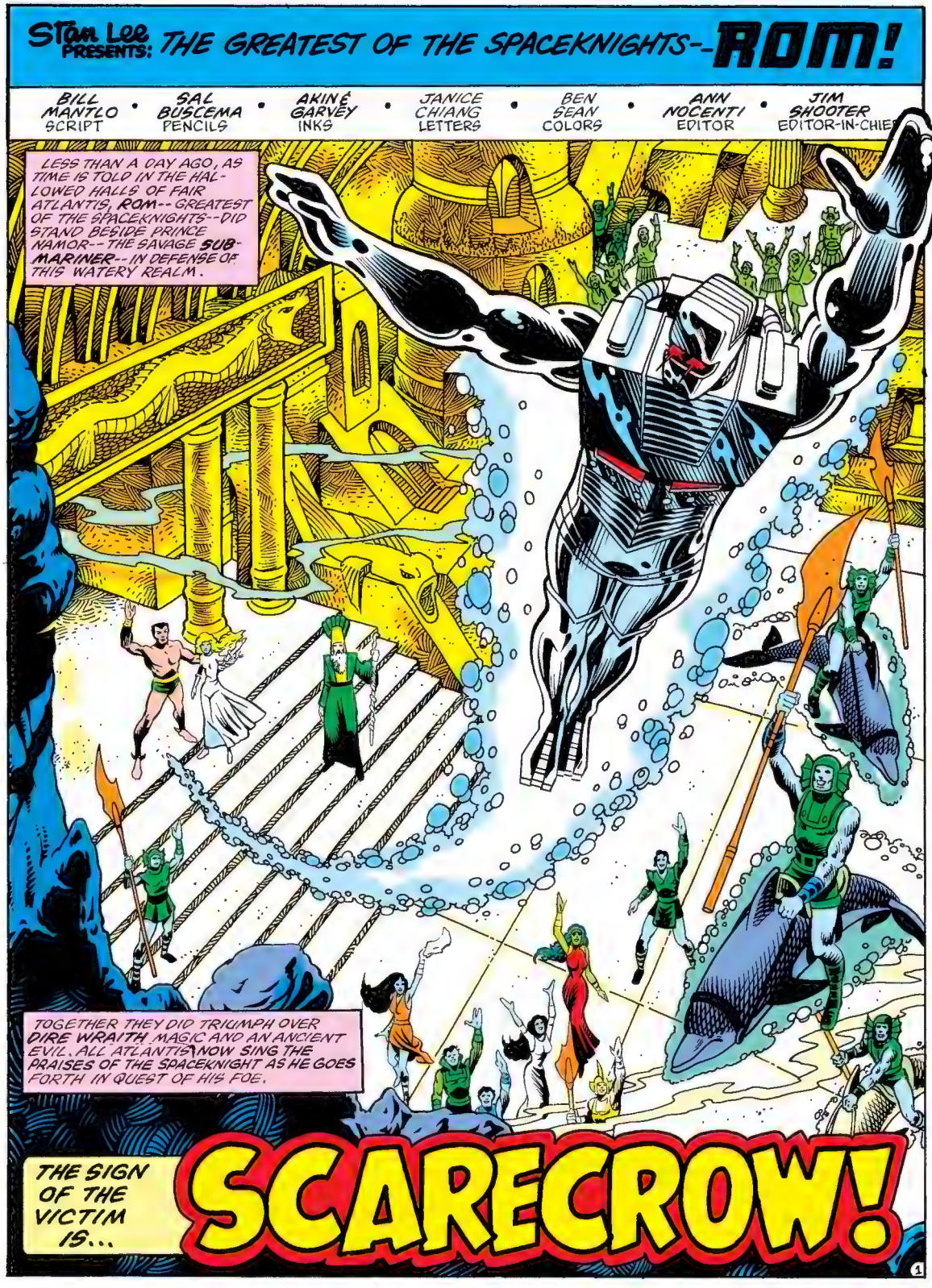
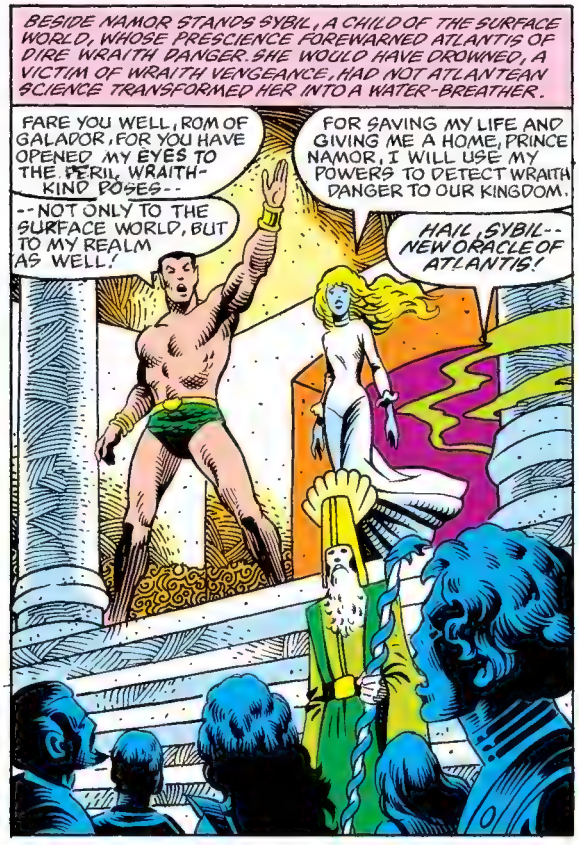
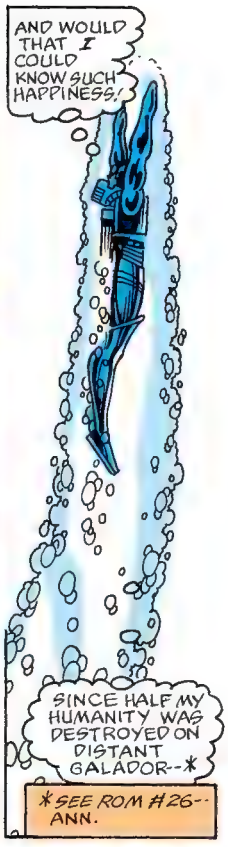
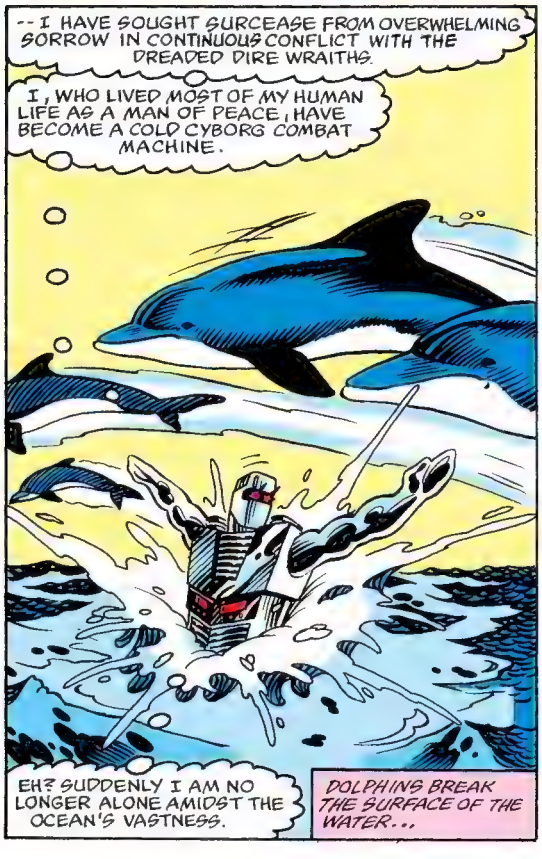
ROM™
SPACEKNIGHT
DIE, WRAITH SCUM! FROM THIS MOMENT FORTH, ROM WILL SHOW NO MERCY!
S. BISLEMA & MILGROM


Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPT
SAL BUSCEMA PENCILS
AKIN& GARVEY INKS
JANICE CHIANG LETTERS
BEN SEAN COLORS
ANN NOCENTI EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
LESS THAN A DAY AGO, AS TIME IS TOLD IN THE HALLOWED HALLS OF FAIR ATLANTIS, ROM--GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--DID STAND BESIDE PRINCE NAMOR--THE SAVAGE SUB-MARINER--IN DEFENSE OF THIS WATERY REALM.
TOGETHER THEY DID TRIUMPH OVER DIRE WRAITH, MAGIC AND AN ANCIENT EVIL. ALL ATLANTIS NOW SING THE PRAISES OF THE SPACEKNIGHT AS HE GOES FORTH IN QUEST OF HIS FOE.
THE SIGN OF THE VICTIM IS...
SCARECROW!
1

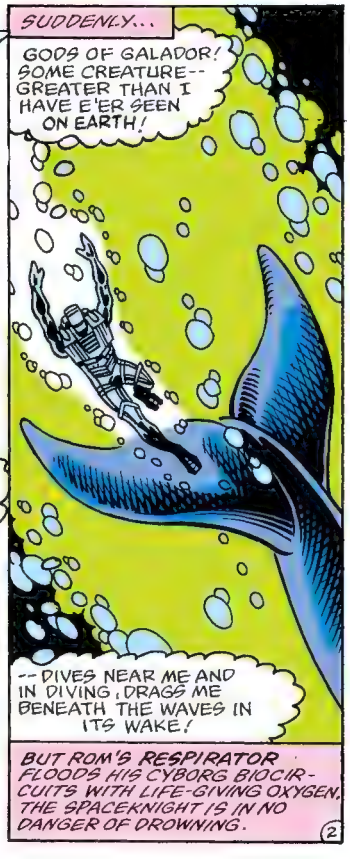

BESIDE NAMOR STANDS SYBIL, A CHILD OF THE SURFACE WORLD, WHOSE PRESCIENCE FOREWARNED ATLANTIS OF DIRE WRAITH DANGER. SHE WOULD HAVE DROWNED, A VICTIM OF WRAITH VENGEANCE, HAD NOT ATLANTEAN SCIENCE TRANSFORMED HER INTO A WATER-BREATHER.
FARE YOU WELL, ROM OF GALADOR, FOR YOU HAVE OPENED MY EYES TO THE PERIL WRAITH-KIND POSES--
--NOT ONLY TO THE SURFACE WORLD, BUT TO MY REALM AS WELL!
FOR SAVING MY LIFE AND GIVING ME A HOME, PRINCE NAMOR, I WILL USE MY POWERS TO DETECT WRAITH DANGER TO OUR KINGDOM.
HAIL, SYBIL-- NEW ORACLE OF ATLANTIS!

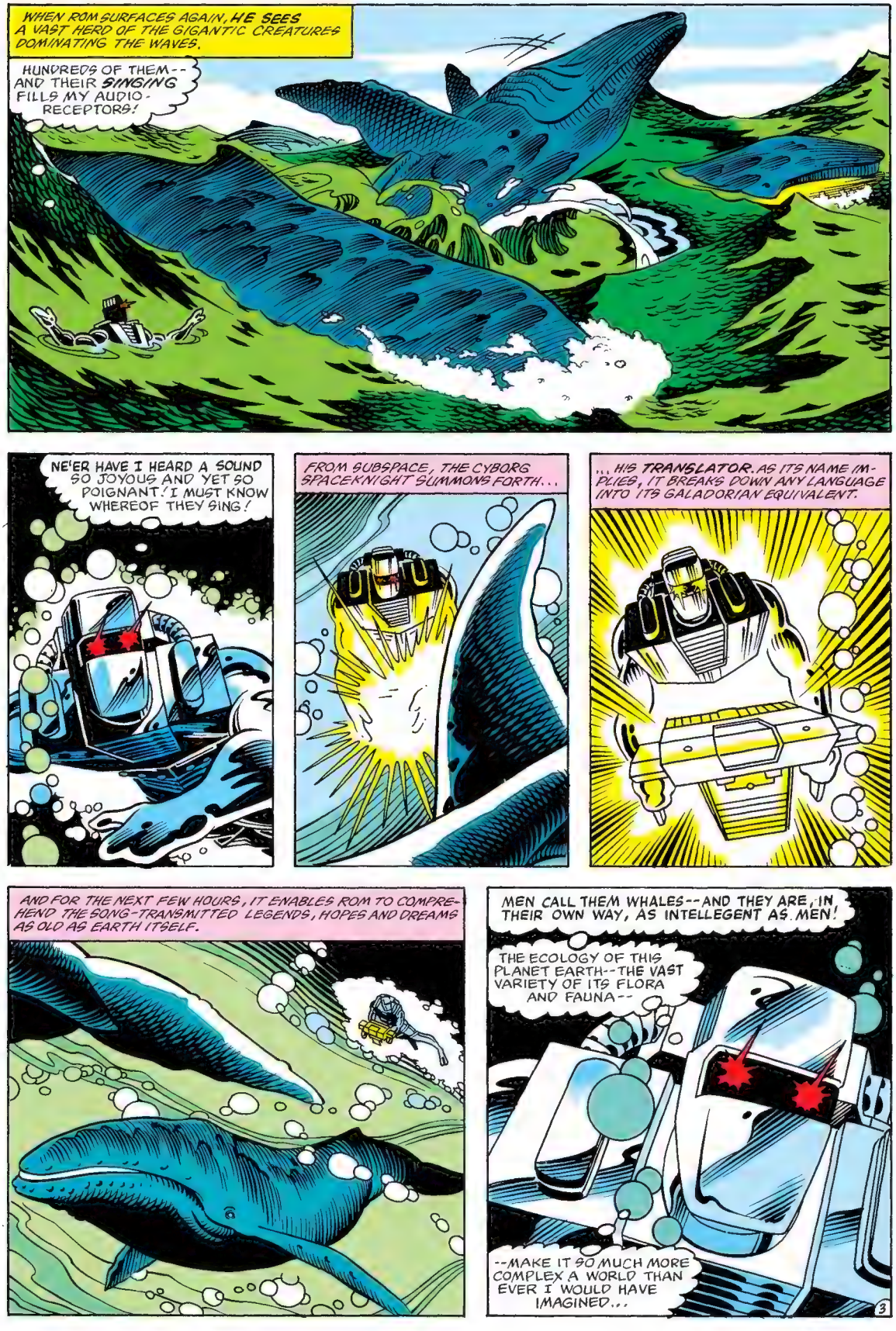
THE CHILD WHOM I SAVED FROM WRAITH MUTATION-- WHOSE PARENTS THE VILE SHAPE-SHIFTERS SLEW-- IS SAFE NOW, ADOPTED INTO A RACE AS NOBLE AS ANY I HAVE EVER SEEN.
GLAD I AM THAT SYBIL HAS FOUND HAPPINESS, ACCEPTANCE, AND A CHANCE TO BEGIN LIFE ANEW.

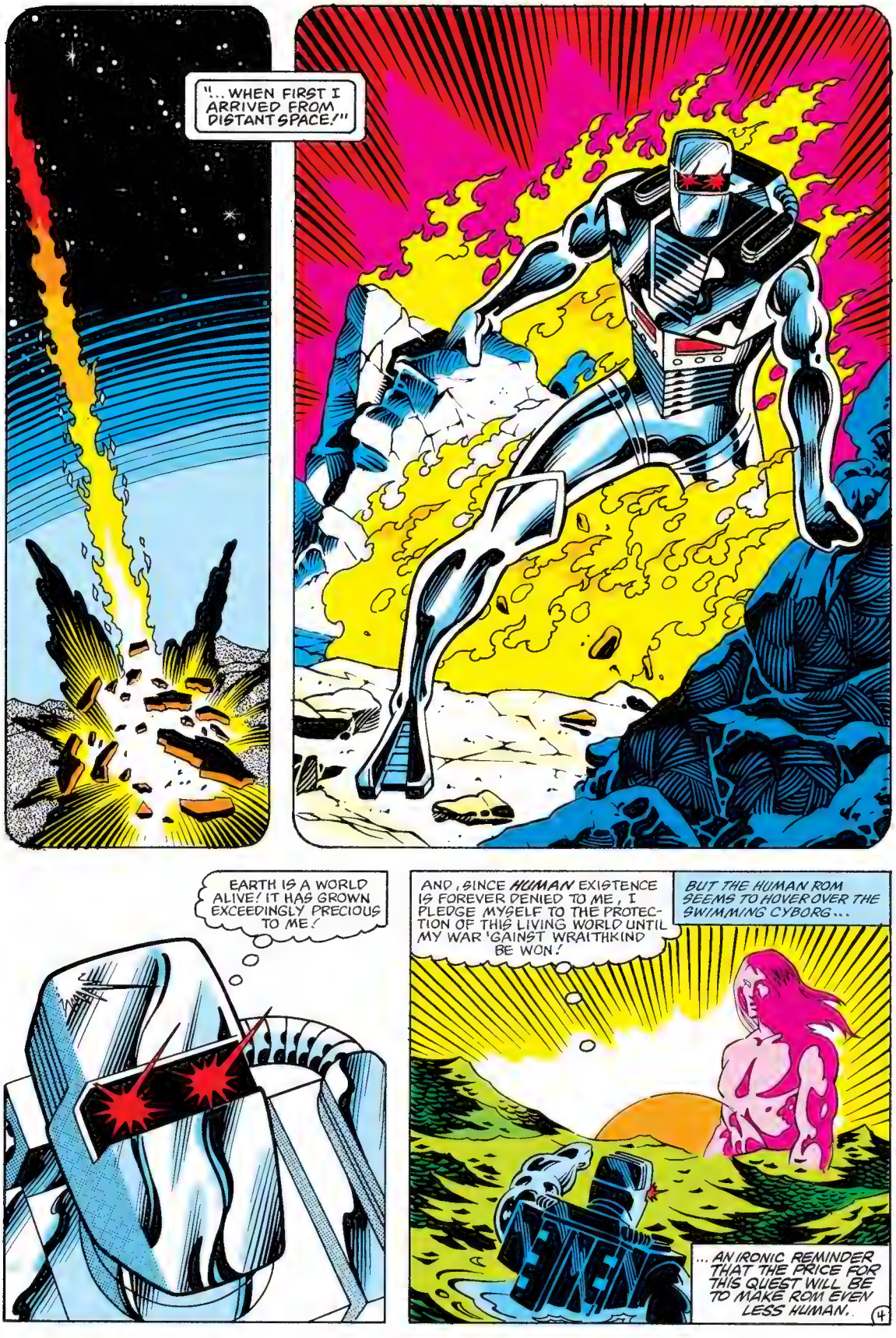

AND WOULD THAT I COULD KNOW SUCH HAPPINESS!
SINCE HALF MY HUMANITY WAS DESTROYED ON DISTANT GALADOR--*
*SEE ROM #26-- ANN.

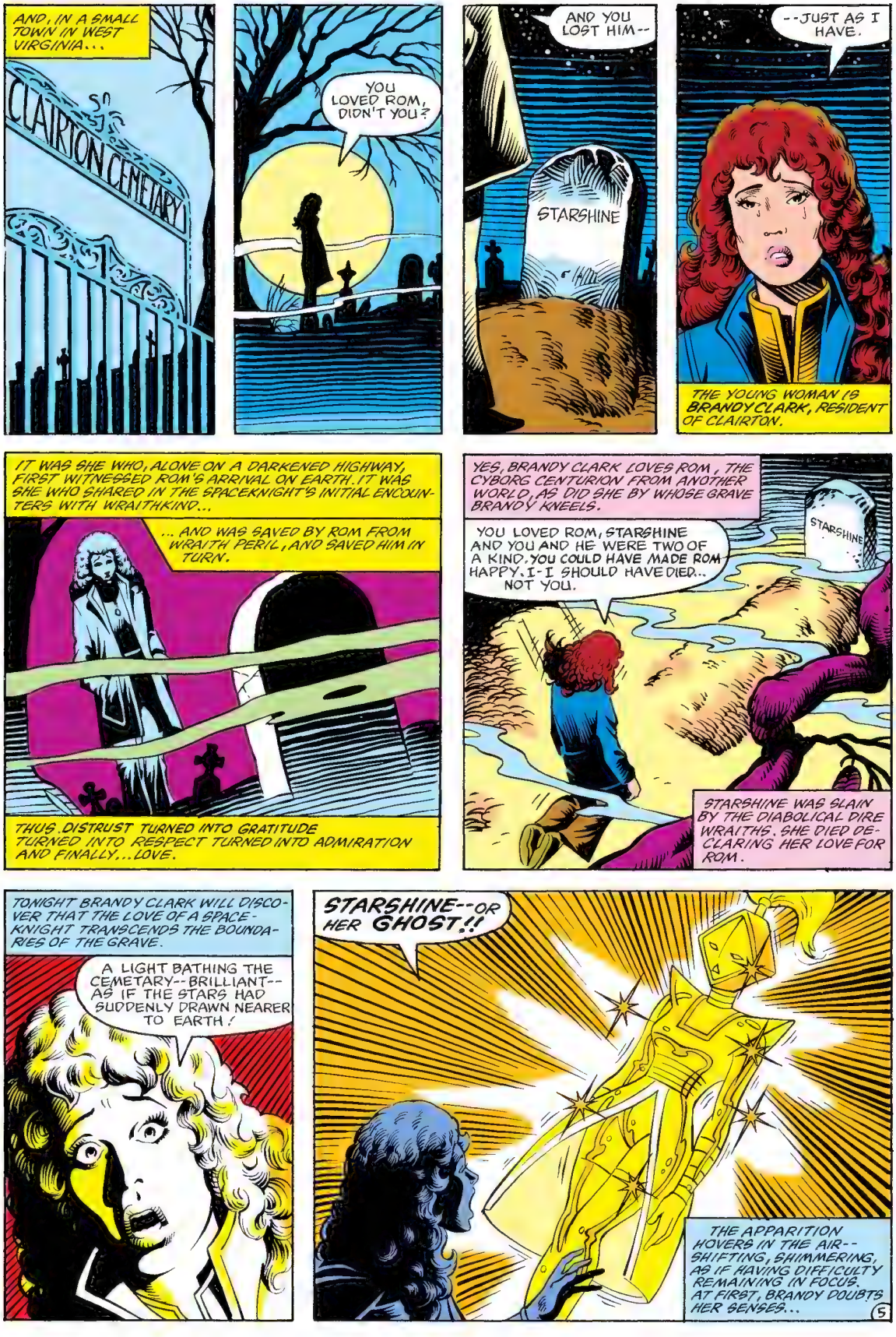

--I HAVE SOUGHT SURCEASE FROM OVERWHELMING SORROW IN CONTINUOUS CONFLICT WITH THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS.
I, WHO LIVED MOST OF MY HUMAN LIFE AS A MAN OF PEACE, HAVE BECOME A COLD CYBORG COMBAT MACHINE.
EH? SUDDENLY I AM NO LONGER ALONE AMIDST THE OCEAN'S VASTNESS.
DOLPHINS BREAK THE SURFACE OF THE WATER...

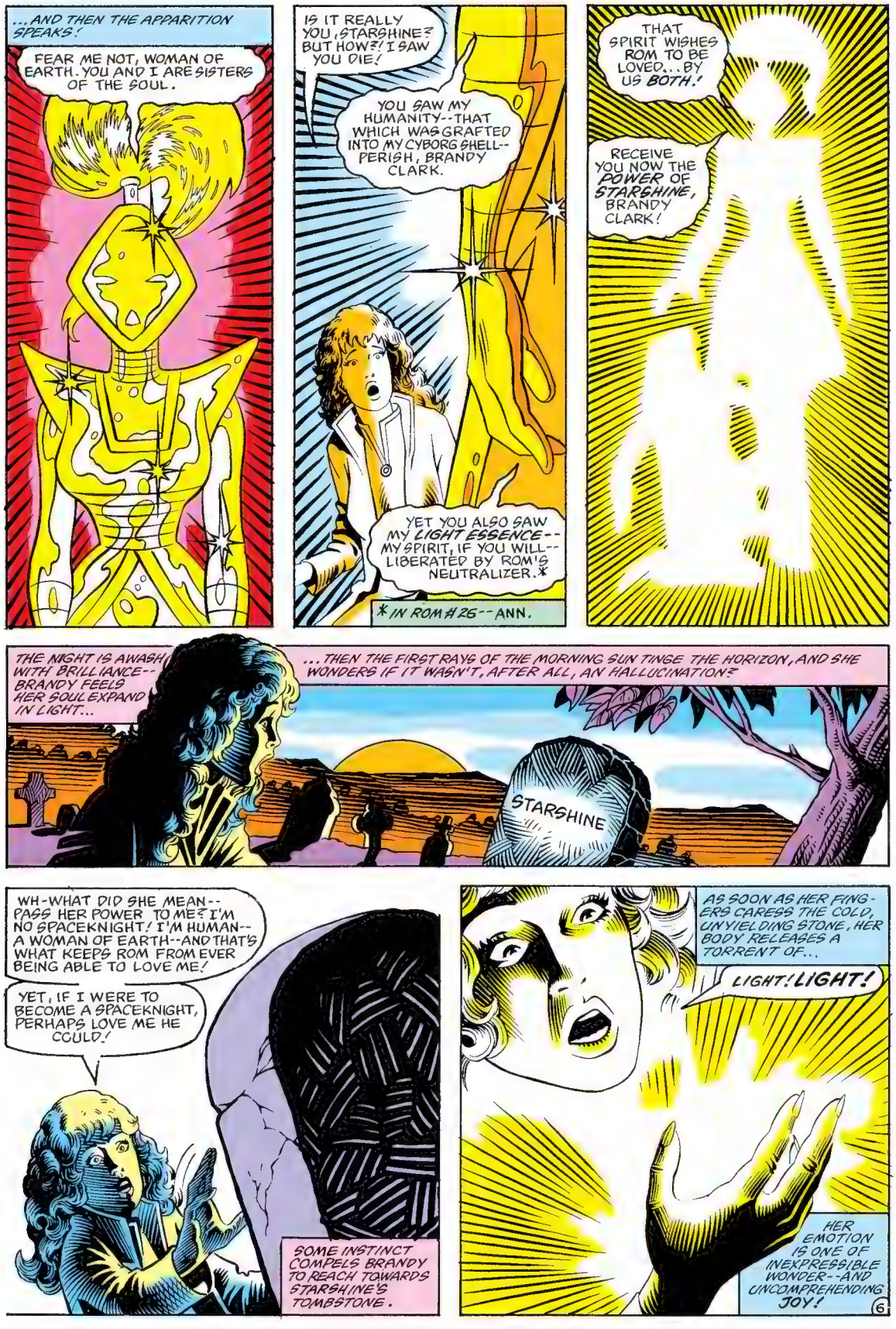
...AND SEAGULLS SOAR O'ER HEAD
WHAT BEAUTY-- WHAT TRANQUILITY ABOUNDS UPON THIS WRAITH-THREATENED PLANET.

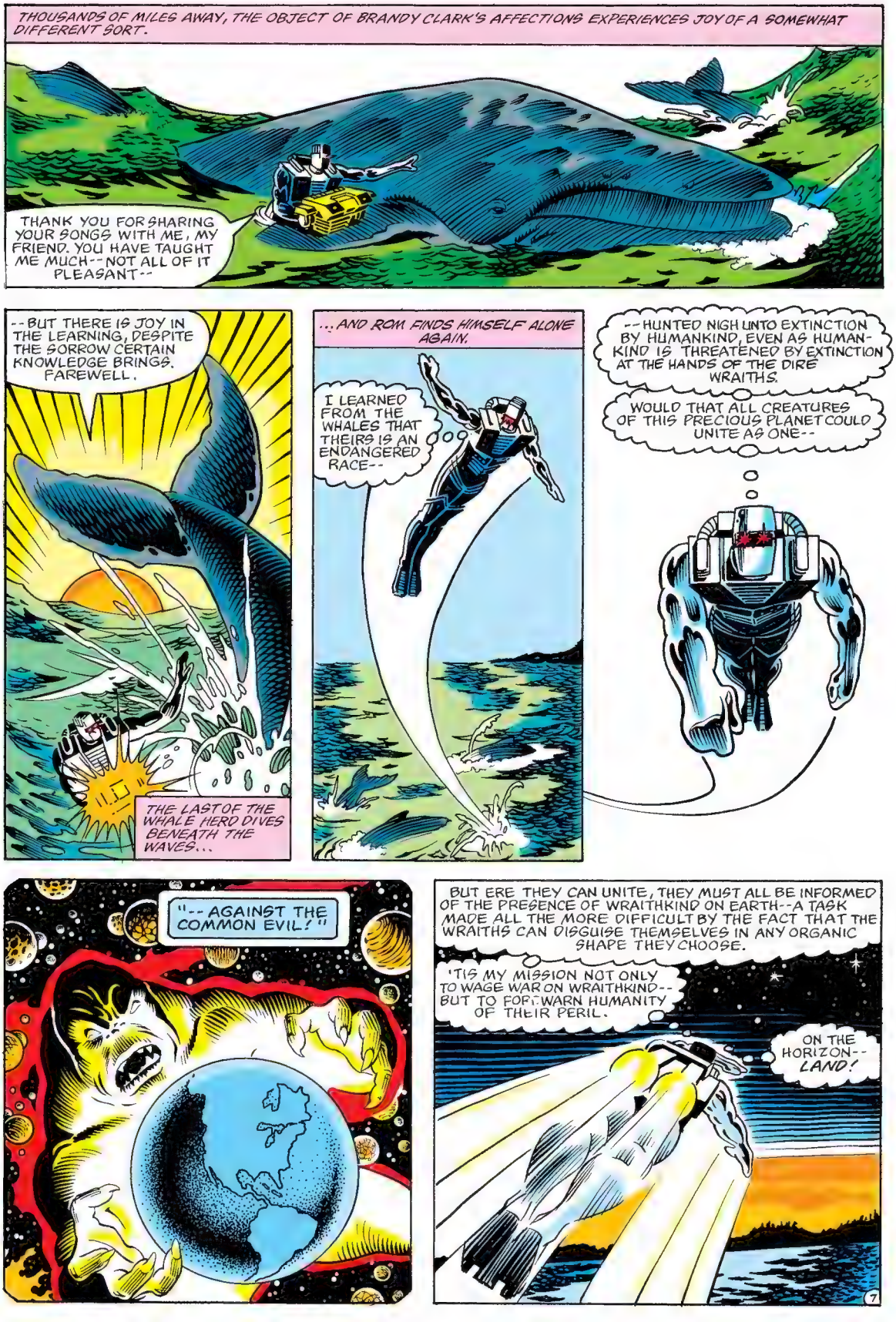

SUDDENLY...
GODS OF GALADOR! SOME CREATURE-- GREATER THAN I HAVE E'ER SEEN ON EARTH!
--DIVES NEAR ME AND IN DIVING, DRAGS ME BENEATH THE WAVES IN ITS WAKE!
BUT ROM'S RESPIRATOR FLOODS HIS CYBORG BIOCIRCUITS WITH LIFE-GIVING OXYGEN. THE SPACEKNIGHT IS IN NO DANGER OF DROWNING.
2

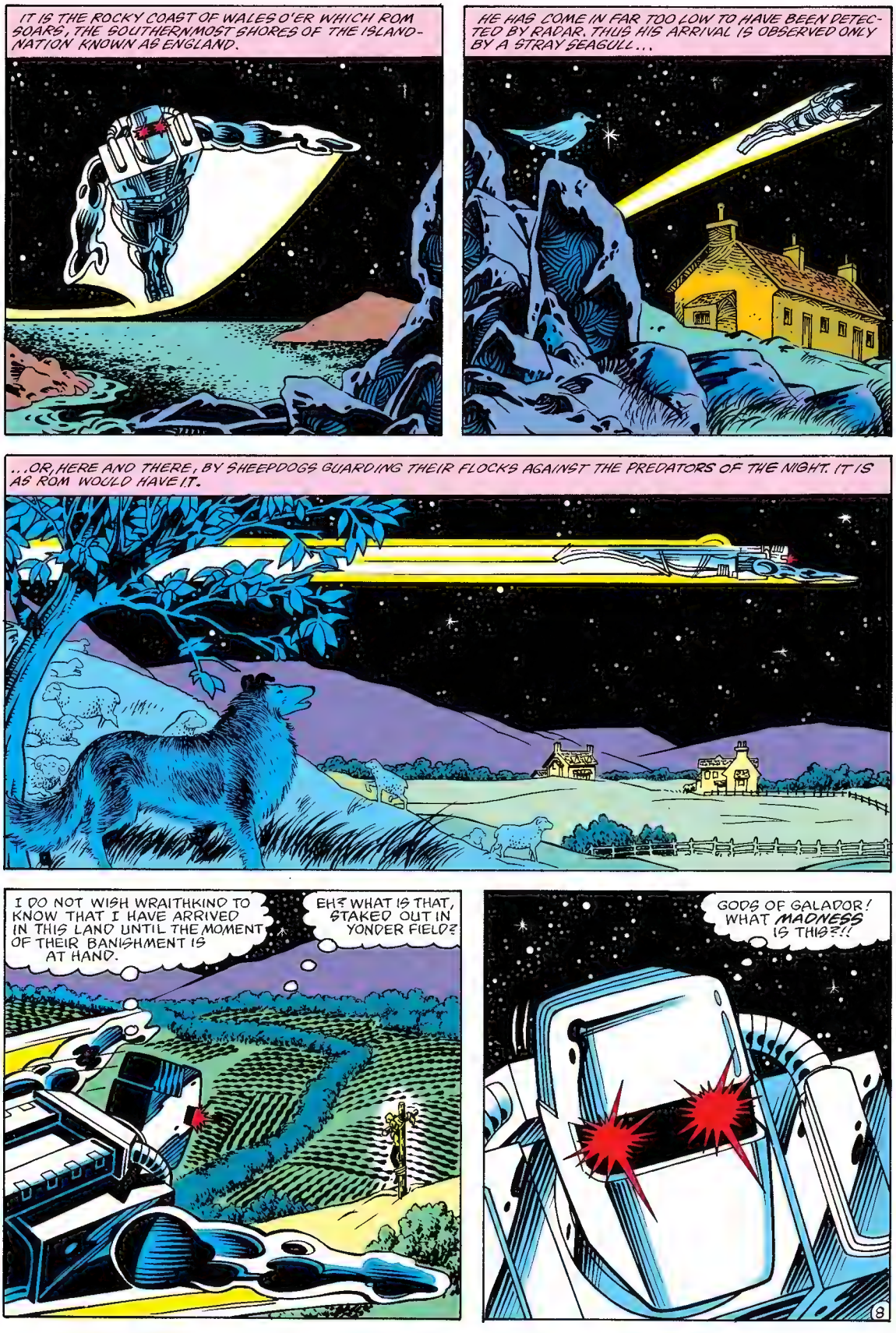

WHEN ROM SURFACES AGAIN, HE SEES A VAST HERD OF THE GIGANTIC CREATURES DOMINATING THE WAVES.
HUNDREDS OF THEM-- AND THEIR SINGING FILLS MY AUDIO-RECEPTORS!
NE'ER HAVE I HEARD A SOUND SO JOYOUS AND YET SO POIGNANT! I MUST KNOW WHEREOF THEY SING!
FROM SUBSPACE, THE CYBORG SPACEKNIGHT SUMMONS FORTH...
...HIS TRANSLATOR. AS ITS NAME IMPLIES, IT BREAKS DOWN ANY LANGUAGE INTO ITS GALADORIAN EQUIVALENT.
AND FOR THE NEXT FEW HOURS, IT ENABLES ROM TO COMPREHEND THE SONG-TRANSMITTED LEGENDS, HOPES AND DREAMS AS OLD AS EARTH ITSELF.
MEN CALL THEM WHALES--AND THEY ARE, IN THEIR OWN WAY, AS INTELLEGENT AS MEN!
THE ECOLOGY OF THIS PLANET EARTH--THE VAST VARIETY OF ITS FLORA AND FAUNA--
--MAKE IT SO MUCH MORE COMPLEX A WORLD THAN EVER I WOULD HAVE IMAGINED...
3


"...WHEN FIRST I ARRIVED FROM DISTANT SPACE!"
EARTH IS A WORLD ALIVE! IT HAS GROWN EXCEEDINGLY PRECIOUS TO ME!
AND, SINCE HUMAN EXISTENCE IS FOREVER DENIED TO ME, I PLEDGE MYSELF TO THE PROTECTION OF THIS LIVING WORLD UNTIL MY WAR 'GAINST WRAITHKIND BE WON!
BUT THE HUMAN ROM SEEMS TO HOVER OVER THE SWIMMING CYBORG...
...AN IRONIC REMINDER THAT THE PRICE FOR THIS QUEST WILL BE TO MAKE ROM EVEN LESS HUMAN.
4

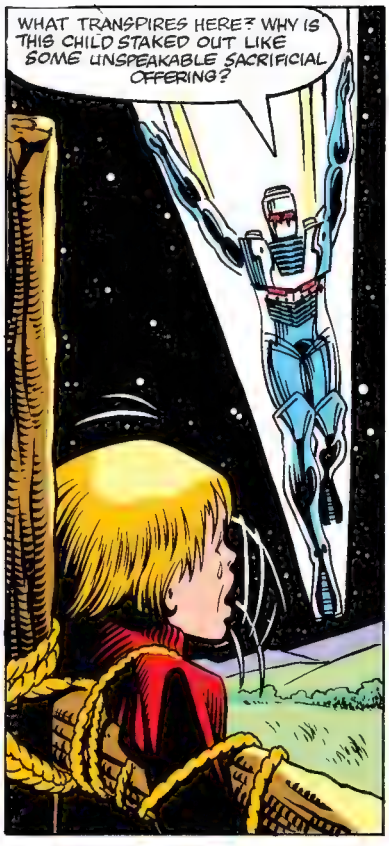

AND, IN A SMALL TOWN IN WEST VIRGINIA...
CLAIRTON CEMETARY
YOU LOVED ROM, DIDN'T YOU?
AND YOU LOST HIM--
STARSHINE
--JUST AS I HAVE.
THE YOUNG WOMAN IS BRANDY CLARK, RESIDENT OF CLAIRTON.
IT WAS SHE WHO, ALONE ON A DARKENED HIGHWAY, FIRST WITNESSED ROM'S ARRIVAL ON EARTH. IT WAS SHE WHO SHARED IN THE SPACEKNIGHT'S INITIAL ENCOUNTERS WITH WRAITHKIND...
... AND WAS SAVED BY ROM FROM WRAITH PERIL, AND SAVED HIM IN TURN.
THUS, DISTRUST TURNED INTO GRATITUDE TURNED INTO RESPECT TURNED INTO ADMIRATION AND FINALLY... LOVE.
YES, BRANDY CLARK LOVES ROM, THE CYBORG CENTURION FROM ANOTHER WORLD, AS DID SHE BY WHOSE GRAVE BRANDY KNEELS.
YOU LOVED ROM, STARSHINE AND YOU AND HE WERE TWO OF A KIND. YOU COULD HAVE MADE ROM HAPPY. I-I SHOULD HAVE DIED.. NOT YOU.
STARSHINE
STARSHINE WAS SLAIN BY THE DIABOLICAL DIRE WRAITHS. SHE DIED DECLARING HER LOVE FOR ROM.
TONIGHT BRANDY CLARK WILL DISCOVER THAT THE LOVE OF A SPACEKNIGHT TRANSCENDS THE BOUNDARIES OF THE GRAVE.
A LIGHT BATHING THE CEMETARY--BRILLIANT--AS IF THE STARS HAD SUDDENLY DRAWN NEARER TO EARTH!
STARSHINE--OR HER GHOST!!
THE APPARITION HOVERS IN THE AIR--SHIFTING, SHIMMERING, AS IF HAVING DIFFICULTY REMAINING IN FOCUS. AT FIRST, BRANDY DOUBTS HER SENSES...
5


...AND THEN THE APPARITION SPEAKS!
FEAR ME NOT, WOMAN OF EARTH. YOU AND I ARE SISTERS OF THE SOUL.
IS IT REALLY YOU, STARSHINE? BUT HOW?! I SAW YOU DIE!
YOU SAW MY HUMANITY--THAT WHICH WAS GRAFTED INTO MY CYBORG SHELL--PERISH, BRANDY CLARK.
YET YOU ALSO SAW MY LIGHT ESSENCE--MY SPIRIT, IF YOU WILL--LIBERATED BY ROM'S NEUTRALIZER.*
*IN ROM #26--ANN.
THAT SPIRIT WISHES ROM TO BE LOVED...BY US BOTH!
RECEIVE YOU NOW THE POWER OF STARSHINE, BRANDY CLARK!
THE NIGHT IS AWASH WITH BRILLIANCE--BRANDY FEELS HER SOUL EXPAND IN LIGHT...
...THEN THE FIRST RAYS OF THE MORNING SUN TINGE THE HORIZON, AND SHE WONDERS IF IT WASN'T, AFTER ALL, AN HALLUCINATION?
STARSHINE
WH-WHAT DID SHE MEAN--PASS HER POWER TO ME? I'M NO SPACEKNIGHT! I'M HUMAN--A WOMAN OF EARTH--AND THAT'S WHAT KEEPS ROM FROM EVER BEING ABLE TO LOVE ME!
YET, IF I WERE TO BECOME A SPACEKNIGHT, PERHAPS LOVE ME HE COULD!
SOME INSTINCT COMPELS BRANDY TO REACH TOWARDS STARSHINE'S TOMBSTONE.
AS SOON AS HER FINGERS CARESS THE COLD, UNYIELDING STONE, HER BODY RELEASES A TORRENT OF...
LIGHT! LIGHT!
HER EMOTION IS ONE OF INEXPRESSIBLE WONDER--AND UNCOMPREHENDING JOY!
6

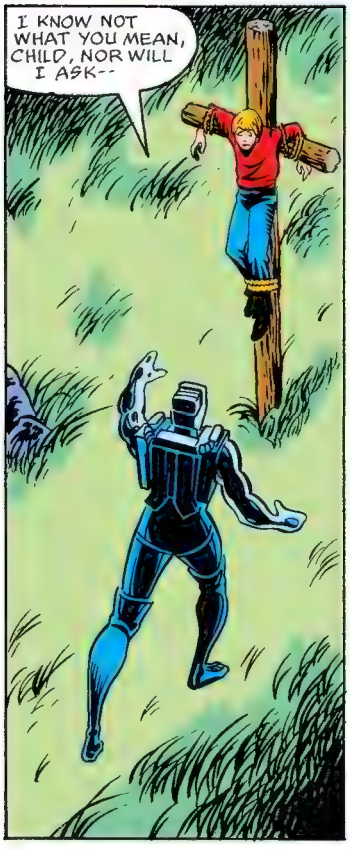

THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY, THE OBJECT OF BRANDY CLARK'S AFFECTIONS EXPERIENCES JOY OF A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT SORT.
THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR SONGS WITH ME, MY FRIEND. YOU HAVE TAUGHT ME MUCH--NOT ALL OF IT PLEASANT--
--BUT THERE IS JOY IN THE LEARNING, DESPITE THE SORROW CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE BRINGS. FAREWELL.
THE LAST OF THE WHALE HERD DIVES BENEATH THE WAVES...
...AND ROM FINDS HIMSELF ALONE AGAIN.
I LEARNED FROM THE WHALES THAT THEIRS IS AN ENDANGERED RACE--
--HUNTED NIGH UNTO EXTINCTION BY HUMANKIND, EVEN AS HUMANKIND IS THREATENED BY EXTINCTION AT THE HANDS OF THE DIRE WRAITHS.
WOULD THAT ALL CREATURES OF THIS PRECIOUS PLANET COULD UNITE AS ONE--
"--AGAINST THE COMMON EVIL!"
BUT ERE THEY CAN UNITE, THEY MUST ALL BE INFORMED OF THE PRESENCE OF WRAITHKIND ON EARTH--A TASK MADE ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT BY THE FACT THAT THE WRAITHS CAN DISGUISE THEMSELVES IN ANY ORGANIC SHAPE THEY CHOOSE.
'TIS MY MISSION NOT ONLY TO WAGE WAR ON WRAITHKIND--BUT TO FORE-WARN HUMANITY OF THEIR PERIL.
ON THE HORIZON--LAND!
7

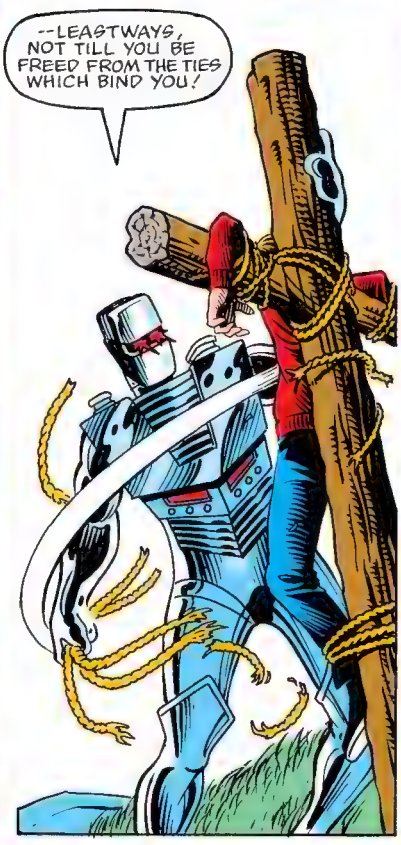

IT IS THE ROCKY COAST OF WALES O'ER WHICH ROM SOARS, THE SOUTHERNMOST SHORES OF THE ISLAND-NATION KNOWN AS ENGLAND.
HE HAS COME IN FAR TOO LOW TO HAVE BEEN DETECTED BY RADAR. THUS HIS ARRIVAL IS OBSERVED ONLY BY A STRAY SEAGULL...
...OR, HERE AND THERE, BY SHEEPDOGS GUARDING THEIR FLOCKS AGAINST THE PREDATORS OF THE NIGHT. IT IS AS ROM WOULD HAVE IT.
I DO NOT WISH WRAITHKIND TO KNOW THAT I HAVE ARRIVED IN THIS LAND UNTIL THE MOMENT OF THEIR BANISHMENT IS AT HAND.
EH? WHAT IS THAT, STAKED OUT IN YONDER FIELD?
GODS OF GALADOR! WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!!
8

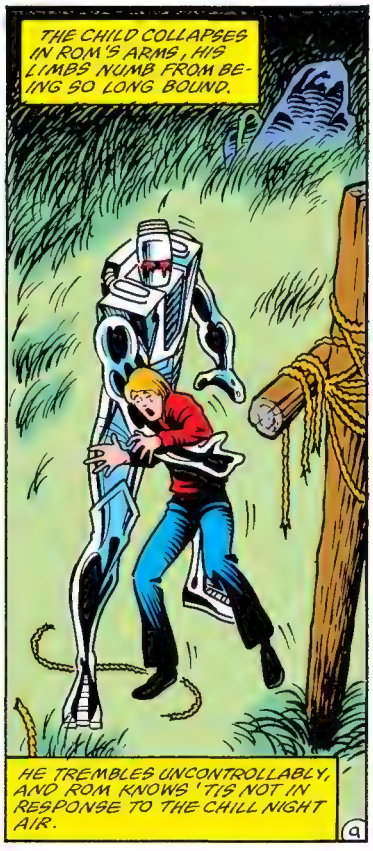
THE CHILD HANGS HELPLESSLY ON THE CROSSBEAMS, A HUMAN SCARECROW-- HIS WHIMPERS BARELY REACHING THE SPACEKNIGHT'S AUDIO-RECEPTORS.
BUT REACH ROM THEY DO, AND THE SPACE-KNIGHT'S CYBORG SOUL CRIES OUT IN HORROR.


WHAT TRANSPIRES HERE? WHY IS THIS CHILD STAKED OUT LIKE SOME UNSPEAKABLE SACRIFICIAL OFFERING?

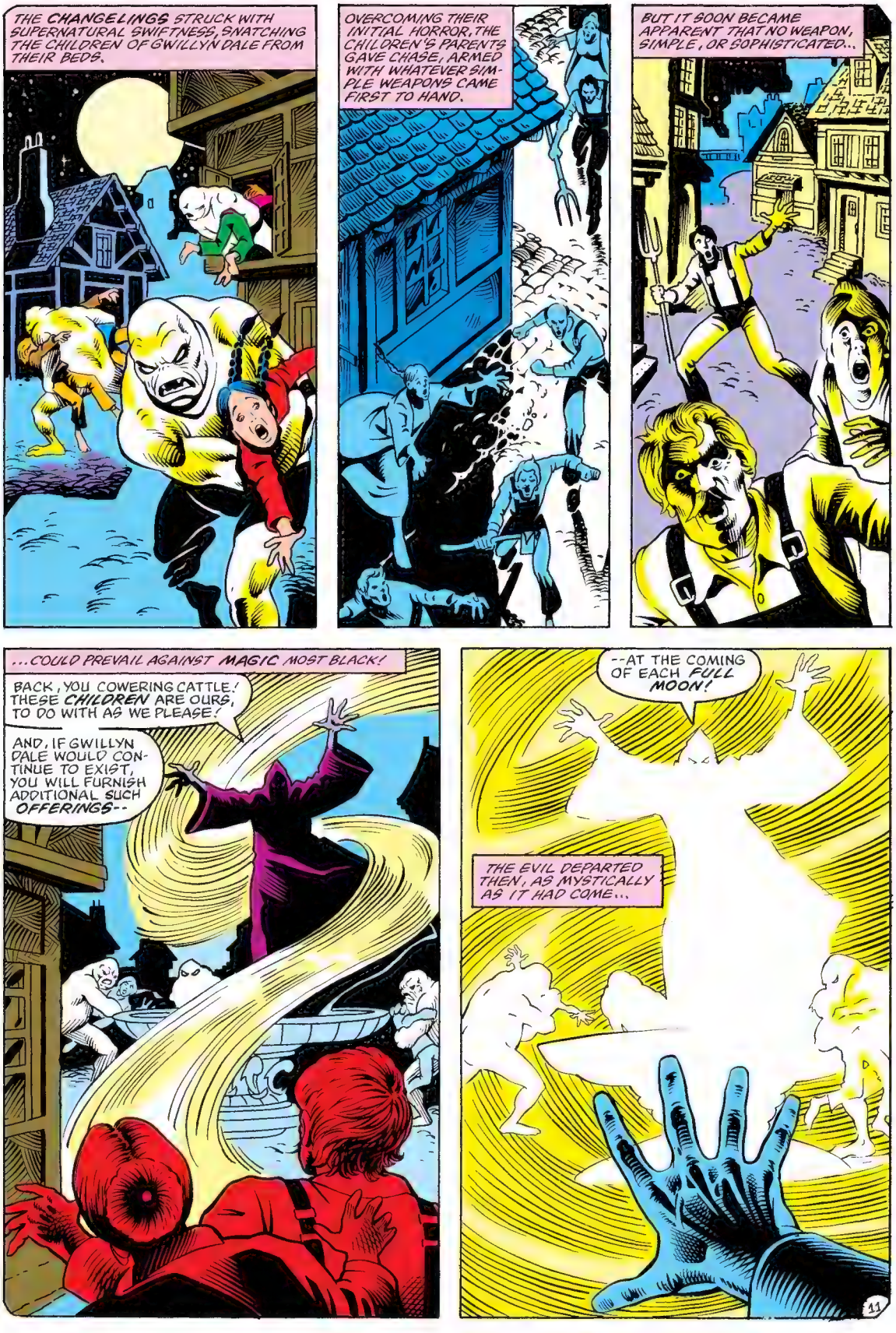
WITH TERROR IN HIS EYES, THE CHILD ANSWERS ROM'S QUESTION WITH A QUESTION.
H-HAVE YOU COME TO TAKE ME--AS YOU TOOK ALL THE OTHERS?

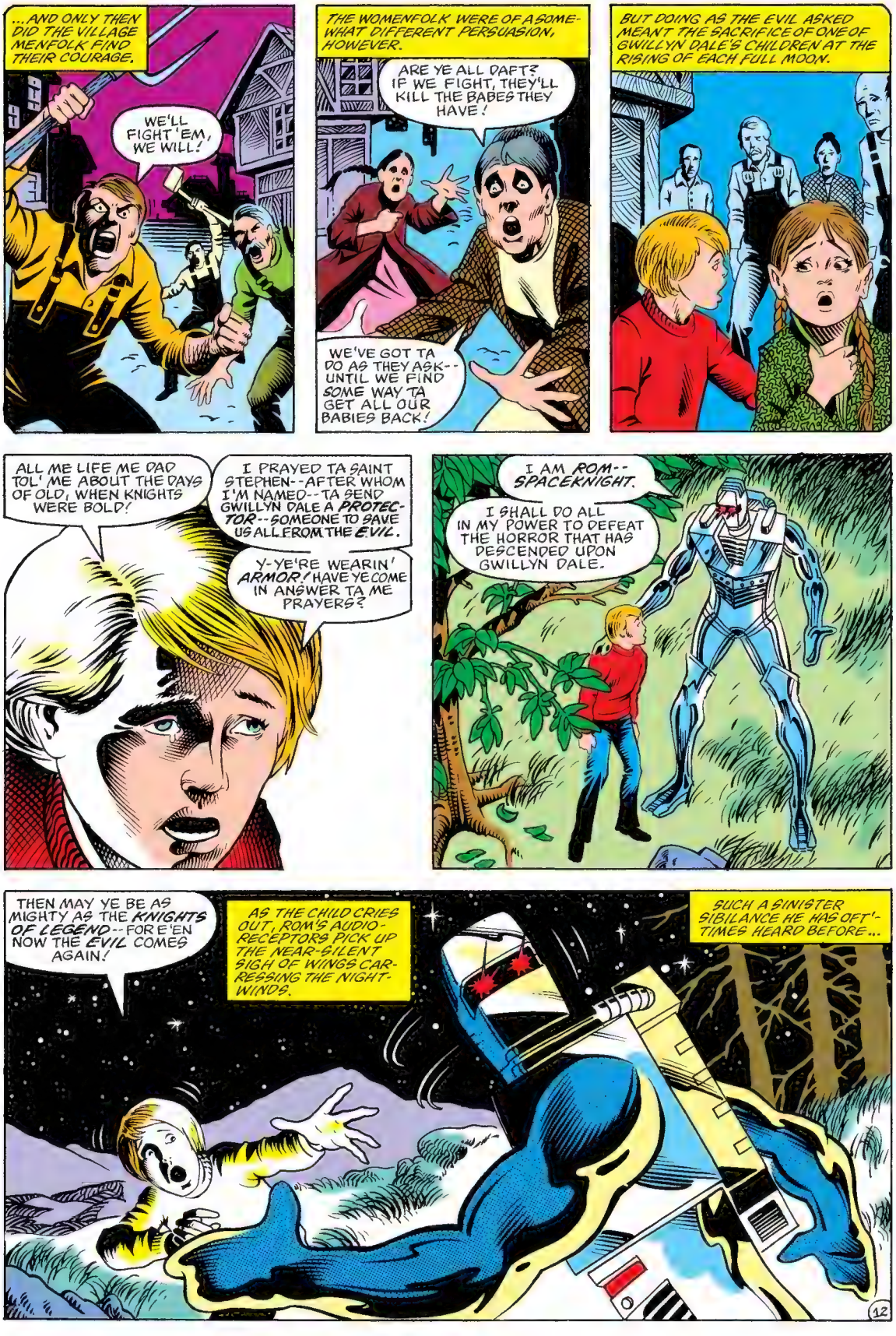

I KNOW NOT WHAT YOU MEAN, CHILD, NOR WILL I ASK--

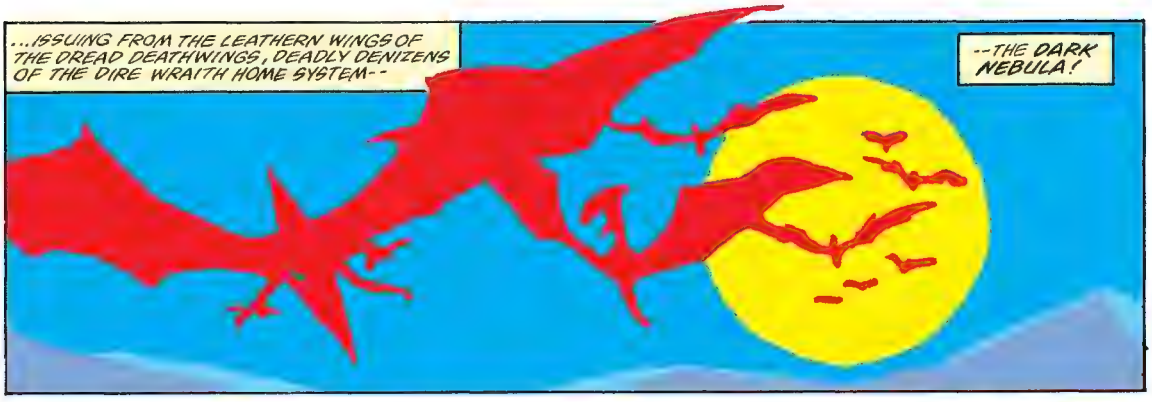

--LEASTWAYS, NOT TILL YOU BE FREED FROM THE TIES WHICH BIND YOU!


THE CHILD COLLAPSES IN ROM'S ARMS, HIS LIMBS NUMB FROM BEING SO LONG BOUND.
HE TREMBLES UNCONTROLLABLY, AND ROM KNOWS 'TIS NOT IN RESPONSE TO THE CHILL NIGHT AIR.

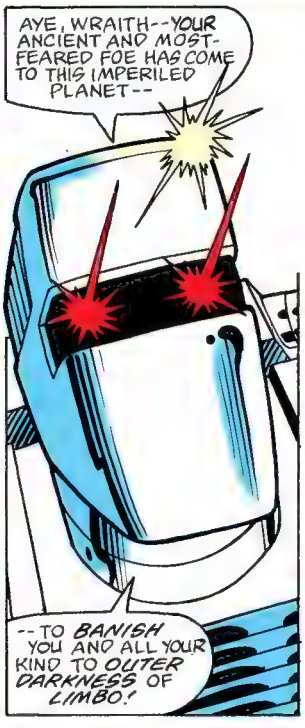
TELL ME, CHILD, WHO INFLICTED THIS PUNISHMENT UPON YOU?
ME MUM AN' DAD!
YOUR PARENTS?! 'TIS BEYOND REASON! WHY?!
STILL SHAKING, THE CHILD GAZES UP INTO THE SOFT CRIMSON GLOW OF ROM'S CYBORG EYES. SOMETHING HE SEES THERE REASSURES HIM. HIS TREMBLING STOPS.
'TWAS MY TURN! I WAS CHOSEN!
CHOSEN? FOR WHAT FATE?
TA BE AN OFFERING--TA KEEP THE EVIL AWAY FROM GWILLYN DALE!
YON HAMLET? 'TIS YOUR HOME?
AYE', AN' A FINE PLACE 'TWAS, TOO--
--'TIL THE NIGHT THE EVIL CAME!
AGAIN THE CHILD TAKES TO TREMBLING...
...AS HE DESCRIBES THE TINY WELSH VILLAGE OF GWILLYN DALE, PEACEFUL AND INDUSTRIOUS AS IT HAD BEEN ALL HIS LIFE--
--AND AS THE HAVEN OF HORROR IT HAD BECOME WITH THE ADVENT OF THE EVIL!
10


THE CHANGELINGS STRUCK WITH SUPERNATURAL SWIFTNESS, SNATCHING THE CHILDREN OF GWILLYN DALE FROM THEIR BEDS.
OVERCOMING THEIR INITIAL HORROR, THE CHILDREN'S PARENTS GAVE CHASE, ARMED WITH WHATEVER SIMPLE WEAPONS CAME FIRST TO HAND.
BUT IT SOON BECAME APPARENT THAT NO WEAPON, SIMPLE, OR SOPHISTICATED...
...COULD PREVAIL AGAINST MAGIC MOST BLACK!
BACK, YOU COWERING CATTLE! THESE CHILDREN ARE OURS, TO DO WITH AS WE PLEASE!
AND, IF GWILLYN DALE WOULD CONTINUE TO EXIST, YOU WILL FURNISH ADDITIONAL SUCH OFFERINGS--
--AT THE COMING OF EACH FULL MOON!
THE EVIL DEPARTED THEN, AS MYSTICALLY AS IT HAD COME...
11


...AND ONLY THEN DID THE VILLAGE MENFOLK FIND THEIR COURAGE.
WE'LL FIGHT 'EM, WE WILL!
THE WOMENFOLK WERE OF A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT PERSUASION, HOWEVER.
ARE YE ALL DAFT? IF WE FIGHT, THEY'LL KILL THE BABES THEY HAVE!
WE'VE GOT TA DO AS THEY ASK--UNTIL WE FIND SOME WAY TA GET ALL OUR BABIES BACK!
BUT DOING AS THE EVIL ASKED MEANT THE SACRIFICE OF ONE OF GWILLYN DALE'S CHILDREN AT THE RISING OF EACH FULL MOON.
ALL ME LIFE ME DAD TOL' ME ABOUT THE DAYS OF OLD, WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD!
I PRAYED TA SAINT STEPHEN--AFTER WHOM I'M NAMED--TA SEND GWILLYN DALE A PROTECTOR--SOMEONE TO SAVE US ALL FROM THE EVIL.
Y-YE'RE WEARIN' ARMOR! HAVE YE COME IN ANSWER TA ME PRAYERS?
I AM ROM--SPACEKNIGHT.
I SHALL DO ALL IN MY POWER TO DEFEAT THE HORROR THAT HAS DESCENDED UPON GWILLYN DALE.
THEN MAY YE BE AS MIGHTY AS THE KNIGHTS OF LEGEND--FOR E'EN NOW THE EVIL COMES AGAIN!
AS THE CHILD CRIES OUT, ROM'S AUDIO-RECEPTORS PICK UP THE NEAR-SILENT SIGH OF WINGS CARRESSING THE NIGHT-WINDS.
SUCH A SINISTER SIBILANCE HE HAS OFT'-TIMES HEARD BEFORE...
12


...ISSUING FROM THE LEATHERN WINGS OF THE DREAD DEATHWINGS, DEADLY DENIZENS OF THE DIRE WRAITH HOME SYSTEM--
--THE DARK NEBULA!

HOWEVER, THE CREATURES WHO FOUL THE FAIR NIGHT AIR ARE NOT THE SINISTER SOUL-FEEDERS, BUT DIRE WRAITHS IN DEATHWING GUISE!
SO, SPACEKNIGHT--THE REPORTS WE HAVE HAD OF YOUR PRESENCE ON EARTH ARE TRUE!

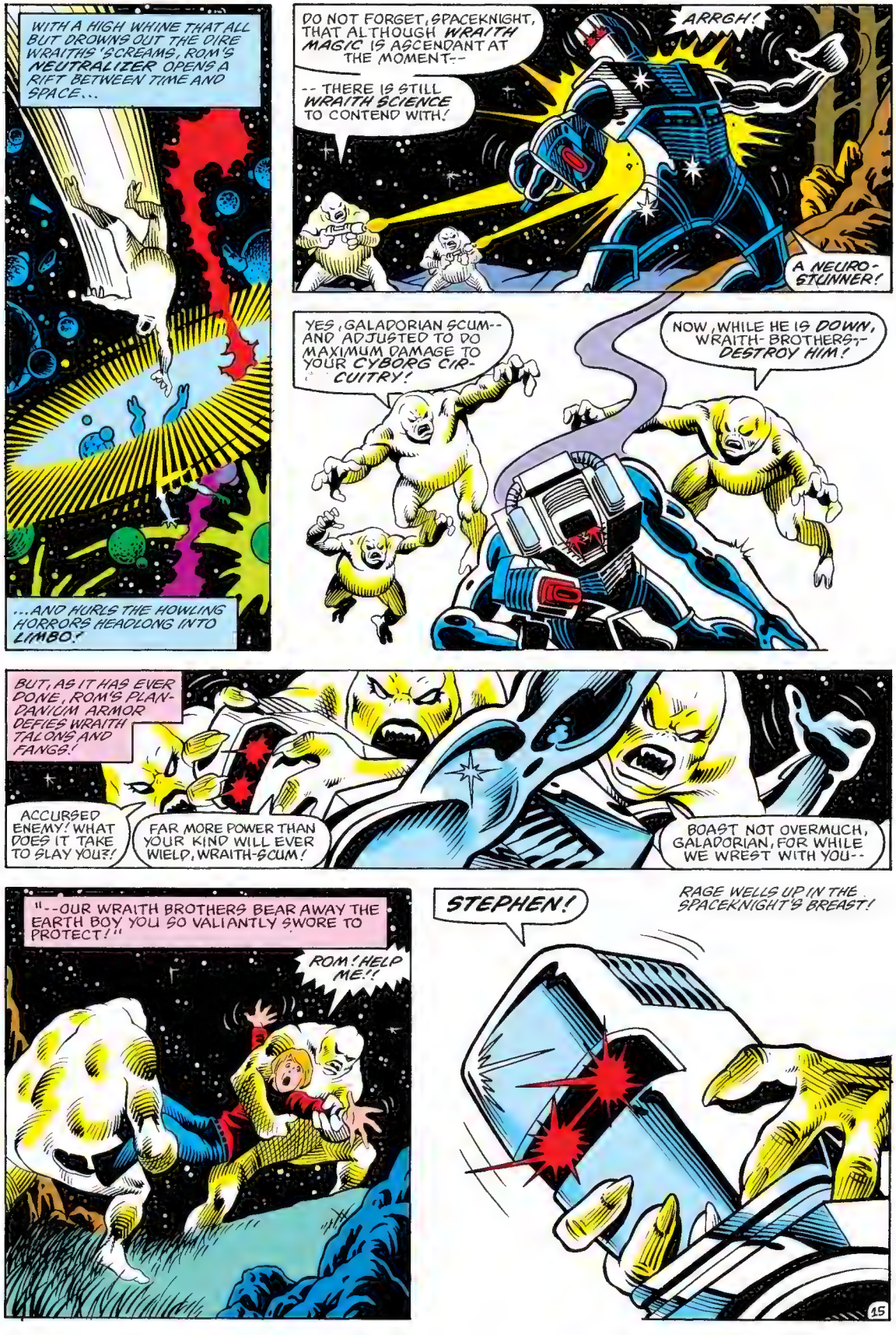

AYE, WRAITH--YOUR ANCIENT AND MOST-FEARED FOE HAS COME TO THIS IMPERILED PLANET--
--TO BANISH YOU AND ALL YOUR KIND TO OUTER DARKNESS OF LIMBO!

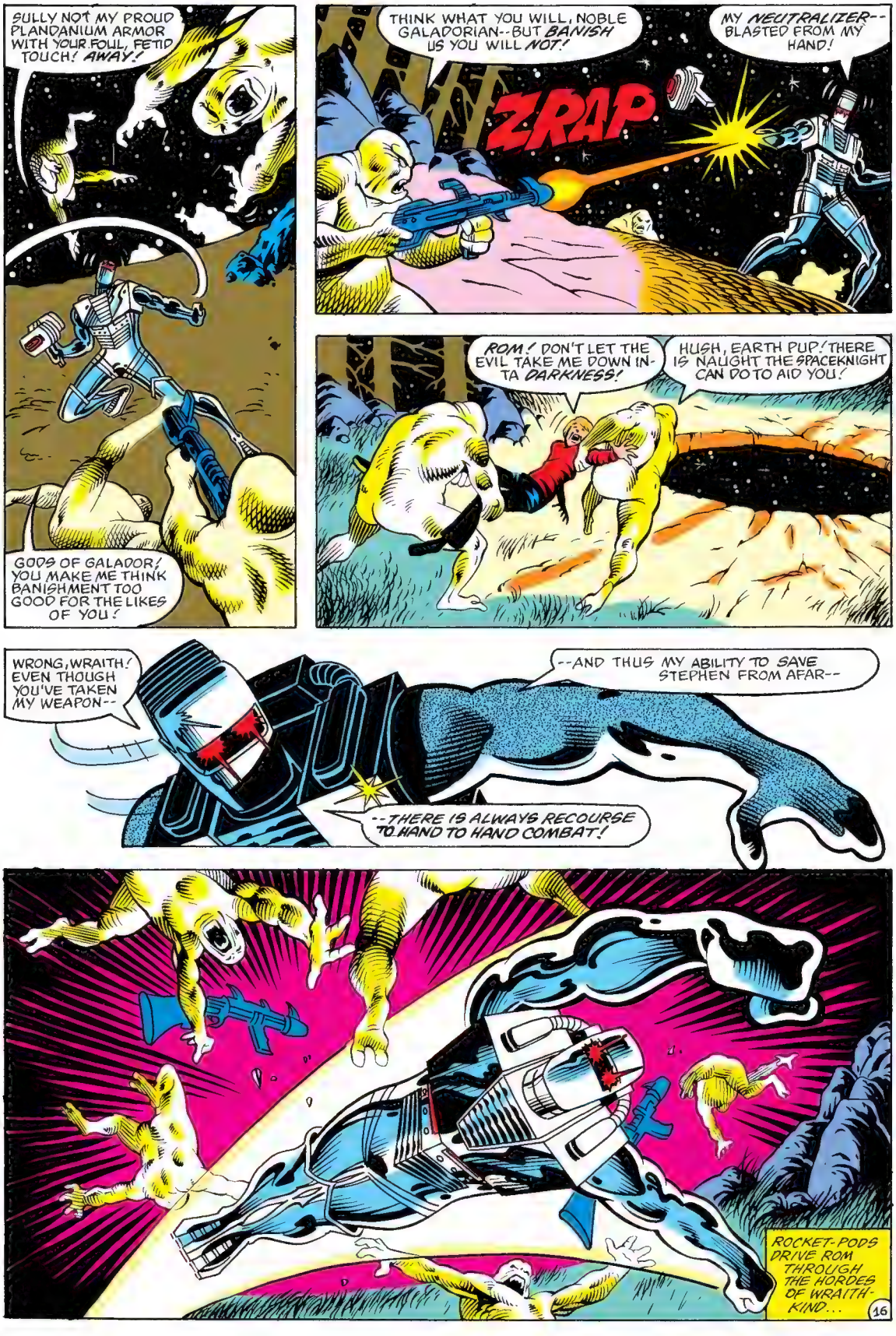
WILL YOU, SPACEKNIGHT? WILL YOU, INDEED?!
YET ANOTHER HIGH WRAITH WITCH?

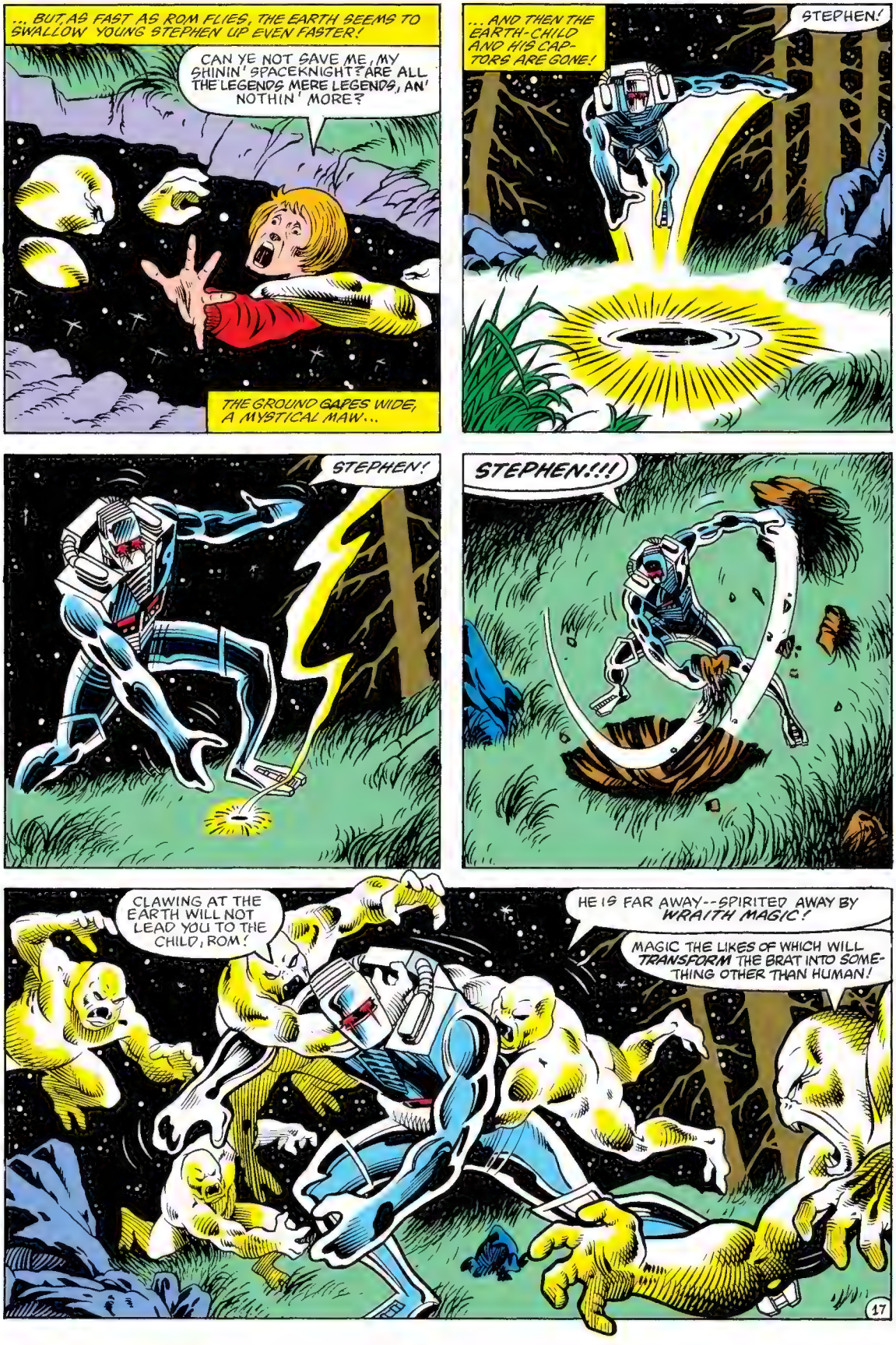
IN THE PAST TWO DAYS I HAVE BANISHED TWO OF YOUR KIND, HAG! *
PREPARE TO JOIN YOUR SISTERS TO FORM A COMMON COVEN IN LIMBO!
* ROM # 33 AND 35-- ANN.

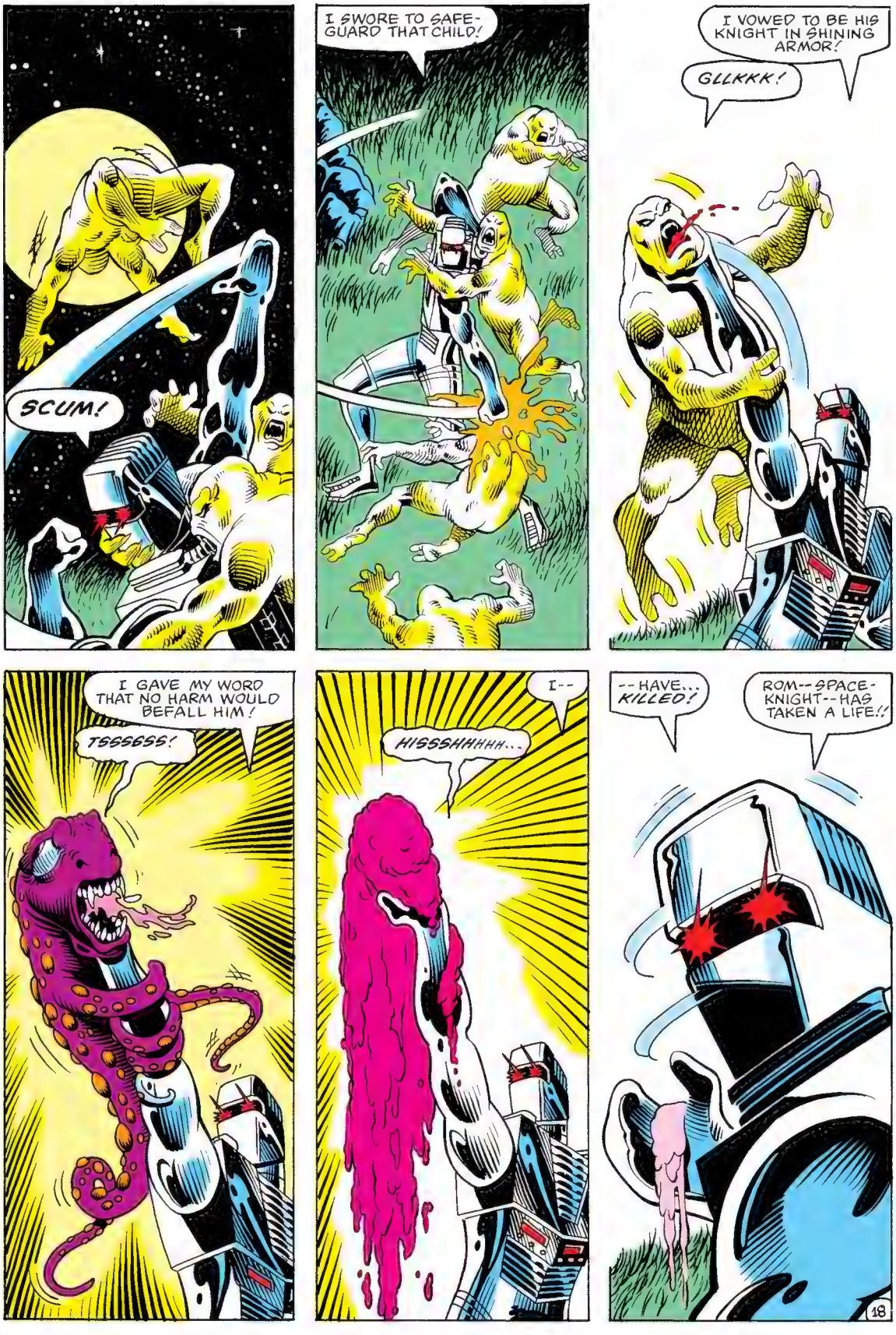
I THINK NOT, GALADORIAN! HAVE YOU NOT WONDERED WHY IT IS WE WITCHES NOW CONVOCATE SO OPENLY?
ONCE EACH YEAR THE HEAVENS SWING INTO UNHOLY ALIGNMENT!
ACROSS UNTOLD LIGHT YEARS, THE BLACK SUN OF OUR DREADED DARK NEBULA NOW CASTS ITS PALL ACROSS THE COSMOS--TO EARTH!
13

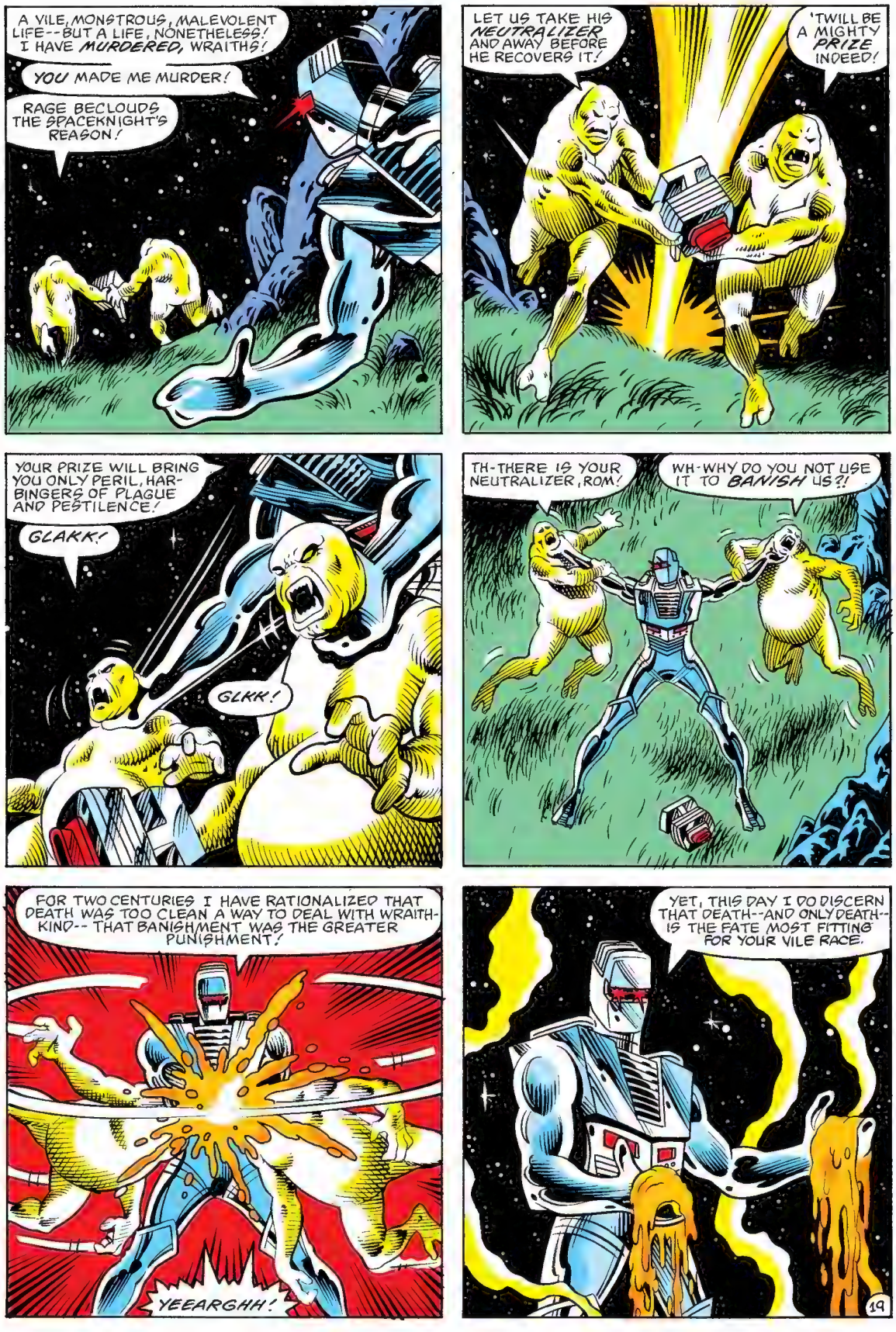
THUS, AS LONG AS ITS SHADOW DOES CROSS THAT OF EARTH'S, OUR DIRE WRAITH BLACK MAGIC IS AT ITS PEAK! THERE IS MUCH WE HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THAT TIME, GALADORIAN--
--INCLUDING OUR UNHOLY ALTERATION OF EARTH'S CHILDREN... AND THE DEATH OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
THEN THAT IS WHY YOUR MALEFICENT SISTER SOUGHT TO TRANSFORM SYBIL, AND WHY YOUR WRAITH HORDES NOW STEAL AWAY THE CHILDREN OF GWILLYN DALE!
THEY WILL BE BORN ANEW, IN WRAITHKIND'S IMAGE--AND SUBSERVIENT TO US!
AND THEY WILL POSSESS THE POWER NECESSARY TO HELP US SUBDUE ALL EARTH!
NOT WHILE MY NEUTRALIZER CAN SEND YOU ALL TO A DESTINATION FAR WORSE THAN THE GRAVE, FOUL FIEND!
YOUR NEUTRALIZER--GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON--CAN DISPATCH THOSE IT STRIKES TO LIMBO, 'TIS TRUE...
BUT, WITH THE CHILDREN OF EARTH ADDED TO OUR RANKS, WRAITHKIND WILL POSSESS AN ARMY INNUMERABLE--
--ONE WHICH, BECAUSE OF YOUR COMPASSION FOR THESE REVOLTING EARTH CATTLE, YOU WILL DARE NOT TURN YOUR WEAPON UPON!
I GO NOW, ROM, BUT REMEMBER--ERR THE COSMIC TIDES REACH THEIR EBB, EARTH WILL BELONG TO WRAITHKIND!
NEVER!
VRRRLEEEET
YEARRGHH!
14

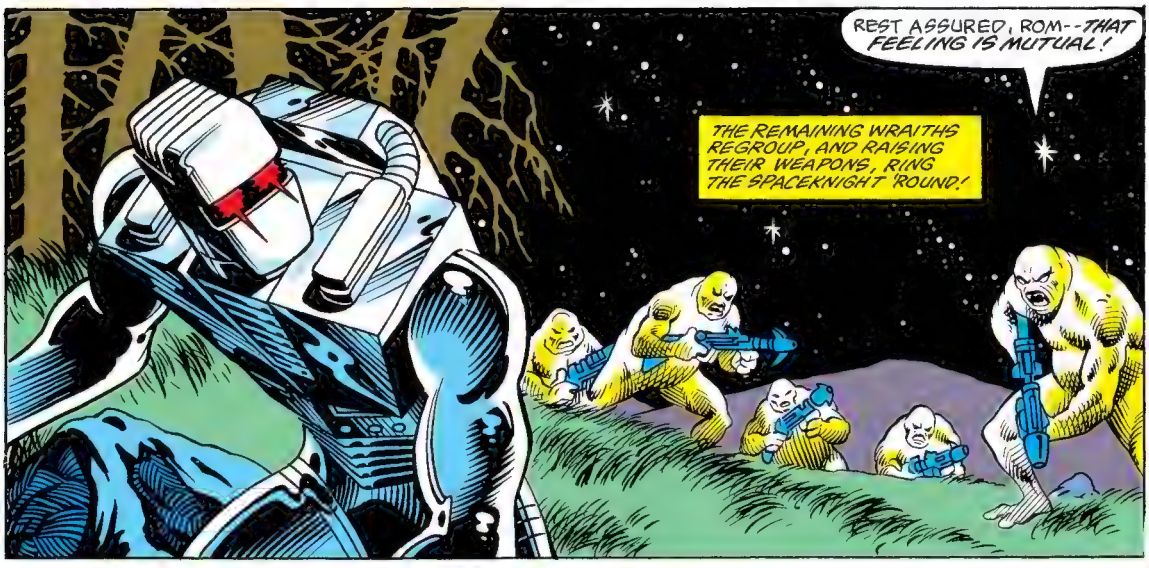

WITH A HIGH WHINE THAT ALL BUT DROWNS OUT THE DIRE WRAITHS' SCREAMS, ROM'S NEUTRALIZER OPENS A RIFT BETWEEN TIME AND SPACE...
...AND HURLS THE HOWLING HORRORS HEADLONG INTO LIMBO!
DO NOT FORGET, SPACEKNIGHT, THAT ALTHOUGH WRAITH MAGIC IS ASCENDANT AT THE MOMENT--
-- THERE IS STILL WRAITH SCIENCE TO CONTEND WITH!
ARRGH!
A NEURO-STUNNER!
YES, GALADORIAN SCUM-- AND ADJUSTED TO DO MAXIMUM DAMAGE TO YOUR CYBORG CIR-CUITRY!
NOW, WHILE HE IS DOWN, WRAITH-BROTHERS,- DESTROY HIM!
BUT, AS IT HAS EVER DONE, ROM'S PLAN-DANIUM ARMOR DEFIES WRAITH TALONS AND FANGS!
ACCURSED ENEMY! WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SLAY YOU?!
FAR MORE POWER THAN YOUR KIND WILL EVER WIELD, WRAITH-SCUM!
BOAST NOT OVERMUCH, GALADORIAN, FOR WHILE WE WREST WITH YOU--
"--OUR WRAITH BROTHERS BEAR AWAY THE EARTH BOY YOU SO VALIANTLY SWORE TO PROTECT!"
ROM! HELP ME!!
STEPHEN!
RAGE WELLS UP IN THE SPACEKNIGHT'S BREAST!
15


SULLY NOT MY PROUD PLANDANIUM ARMOR WITH YOUR FOUL, FETID TOUCH! AWAY!
GODS OF GALADOR! YOU MAKE ME THINK BANISHMENT TOO GOOD FOR THE LIKES OF YOU!
THINK WHAT YOU WILL, NOBLE GALADORIAN--BUT BANISH US YOU WILL NOT!
ZRAP
MY NEUTRALIZER-- BLASTED FROM MY HAND!
ROM! DON'T LET THE EVIL TAKE ME DOWN IN-TA DARKNESS!
HUSH, EARTH PUP! THERE IS NAUGHT THE SPACEKNIGHT CAN DO TO AID YOU!
WRONG, WRAITH! EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE TAKEN MY WEAPON--
--AND THUS MY ABILITY TO SAVE STEPHEN FROM AFAR--
--THERE IS ALWAYS RECOURSE TO HAND TO HAND COMBAT!
ROCKET-PODS DRIVE ROM THROUGH THE HORDES OF WRAITH-KIND...
16

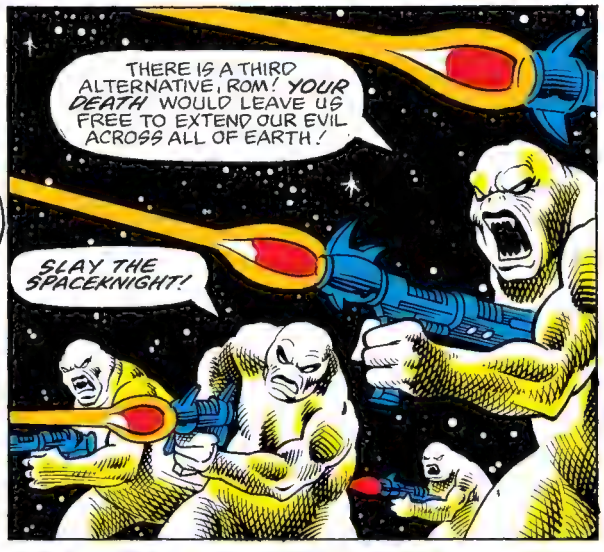

... BUT AS FAST AS ROM FLIES, THE EARTH SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOUNG STEPHEN UP EVEN FASTER!
CAN YE NOT SAVE ME, MY SHININ' SPACEKNIGHT? ARE ALL THE LEGENDS MERE LEGENDS, AN' NOTHIN' MORE?
THE GROUND GAPES WIDE, A MYSTICAL MAW...
... AND THEN THE EARTH-CHILD AND HIS CAPTORS ARE GONE!
STEPHEN!
STEPHEN!
STEPHEN!!!
CLAWING AT THE EARTH WILL NOT LEAD YOU TO THE CHILD, ROM!
HE IS FAR AWAY--SPIRITED AWAY BY WRAITH MAGIC!
MAGIC THE LIKES OF WHICH WILL TRANSFORM THE BRAT INTO SOMETHING OTHER THAN HUMAN!
17


SCUM!
I SWORE TO SAFE-GUARD THAT CHILD!
I VOWED TO BE HIS KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR!
GLLKKK!
I GAVE MY WORD THAT NO HARM WOULD BEFALL HIM!
TSSSSSS!
I--
HISSSHHHHH...
--HAVE... KILLED!
ROM--SPACE-KNIGHT--HAS TAKEN A LIFE!!
18


A VILE, MONSTROUS, MALEVOLENT LIFE--BUT A LIFE, NONETHELESS! I HAVE MURDERED, WRAITHS!
YOU MADE ME MURDER!
RAGE BECLOUDS THE SPACEKNIGHT'S REASON!
LET US TAKE HIS NEUTRALIZER AND AWAY BEFORE HE RECOVERS IT!
'TWILL BE A MIGHTY PRIZE INDEED!
YOUR PRIZE WILL BRING YOU ONLY PERIL, HARBINGERS OF PLAGUE AND PESTILENCE!
GLAKK!
GLKK!
TH-THERE IS YOUR NEUTRALIZER, ROM!
WH-WHY DO YOU NOT USE IT TO BANISH US?!
FOR TWO CENTURIES I HAVE RATIONALIZED THAT DEATH WAS TOO CLEAN A WAY TO DEAL WITH WRAITH-KIND-- THAT BANISHMENT WAS THE GREATER PUNISHMENT!
YEEARGHH!
YET, THIS DAY I DO DISCERN THAT DEATH--AND ONLY DEATH--IS THE FATE MOST FITTING FOR YOUR VILE RACE.
19


REST ASSURED, ROM--THAT FEELING IS MUTUAL!
THE REMAINING WRAITHS REGROUP, AND RAISING THEIR WEAPONS, RING THE SPACEKNIGHT 'ROUND!

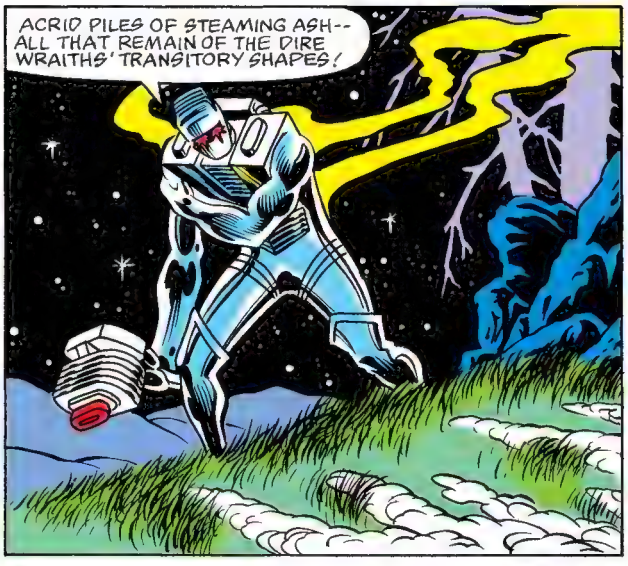
BUT, IN DISPATCHING HIS ENEMIES, ROM ALSO RECOVERED HIS NEUTRALIZER!
KNOW YOU, WRAITHS--THERE CAN BE NO SURRENDER, NO QUARTER GIVEN.
YOUR KIND CANNOT BE IMPRISONED IN ANY EARTHLY CELL!
THE ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES ARE BANISHMENT--OR DEATH!

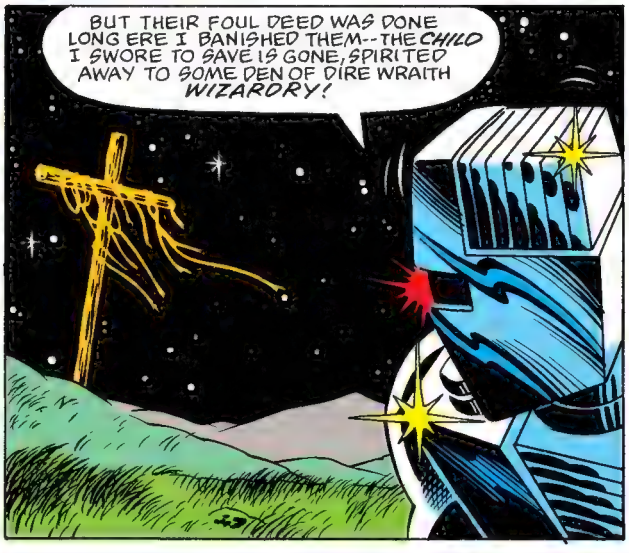

THERE IS A THIRD ALTERNATIVE, ROM! YOUR DEATH WOULD LEAVE US FREE TO EXTEND OUR EVIL ACROSS ALL OF EARTH!
SLAY THE SPACEKNIGHT!

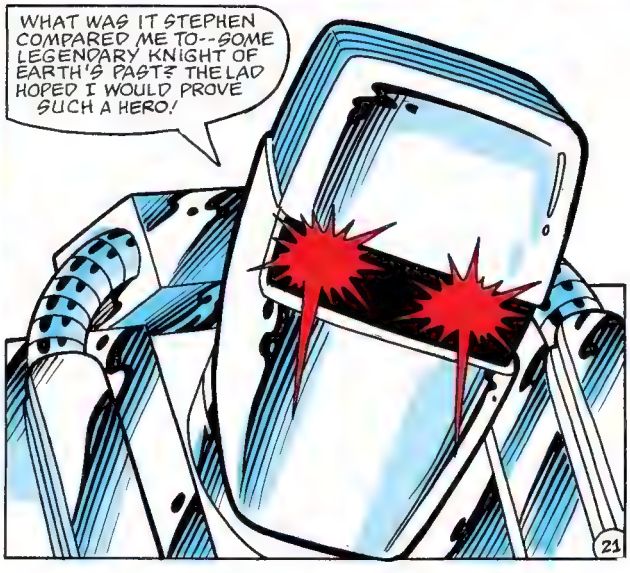
THE LAST IS NOT EVEN A POSSIBILITY SHAPE-SHIFTER, FOR NEUTRALIZER IN HAND--
--I DO NOW CLEANSE THIS PLANET OF THY FOUL KIND!

VREEEEEEE
AGAIN, THE DIMENSIONAL PORTAL YAWNS WIDE...
20

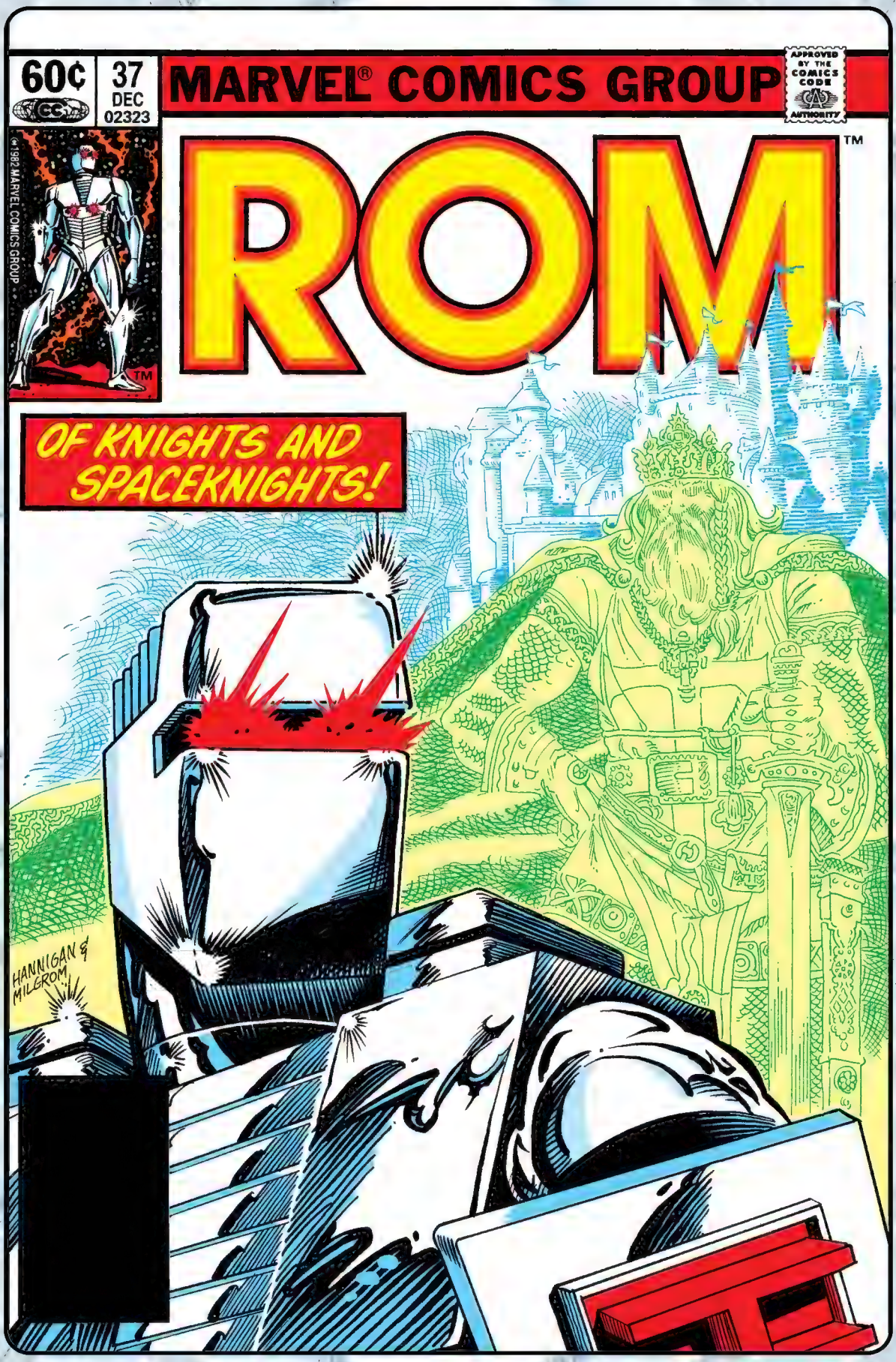
...AND AGAIN THE POPULATION OF LIMBO SWELLS!


ACRID PILES OF STEAMING ASH--ALL THAT REMAIN OF THE DIRE WRAITHS' TRANSITORY SHAPES!


BUT THEIR FOUL DEED WAS DONE LONG ERE I BANISHED THEM--THE CHILD I SWORE TO SAVE IS GONE, SPIRITED AWAY TO SOME DEN OF DIRE WRAITH WIZARDRY!


WHAT WAS IT STEPHEN COMPARED ME TO--SOME LEGENDARY KNIGHT OF EARTH'S PAST? THE LAD HOPED I WOULD PROVE SUCH A HERO!
21

AND SO I SHALL! LIKE THE WARRIOR OF EARTHLY LEGEND, I VOW THAT I SHALL NEVER REST TILL THE CHILDREN OF GWILLYN DALE BE SAVED!
SO SWEARS ROM-- FIRST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
22
NEXT MONTH
SALVATION QUEST!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ROM™
OF KNIGHTS AND SPACEKNIGHTS!
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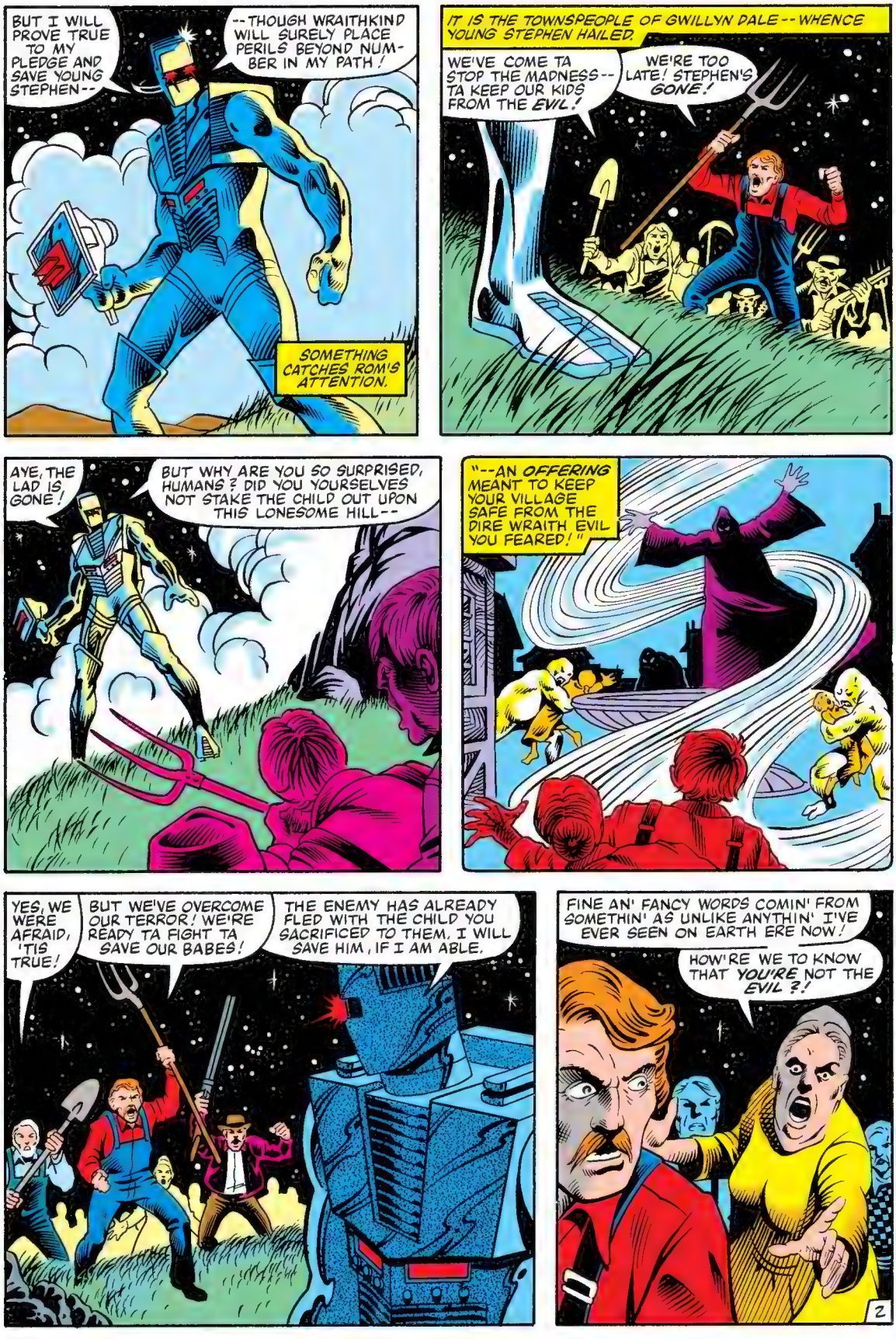
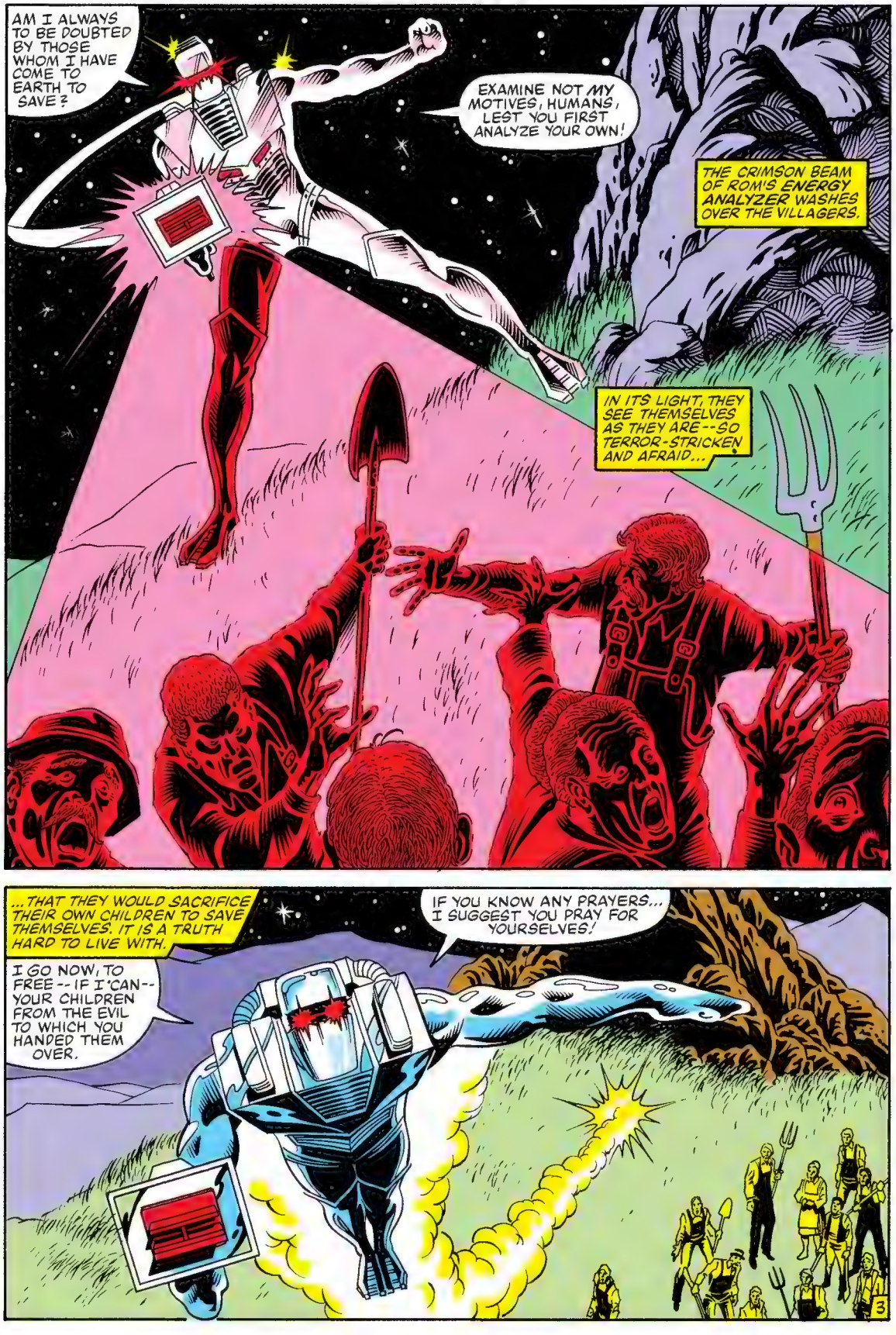
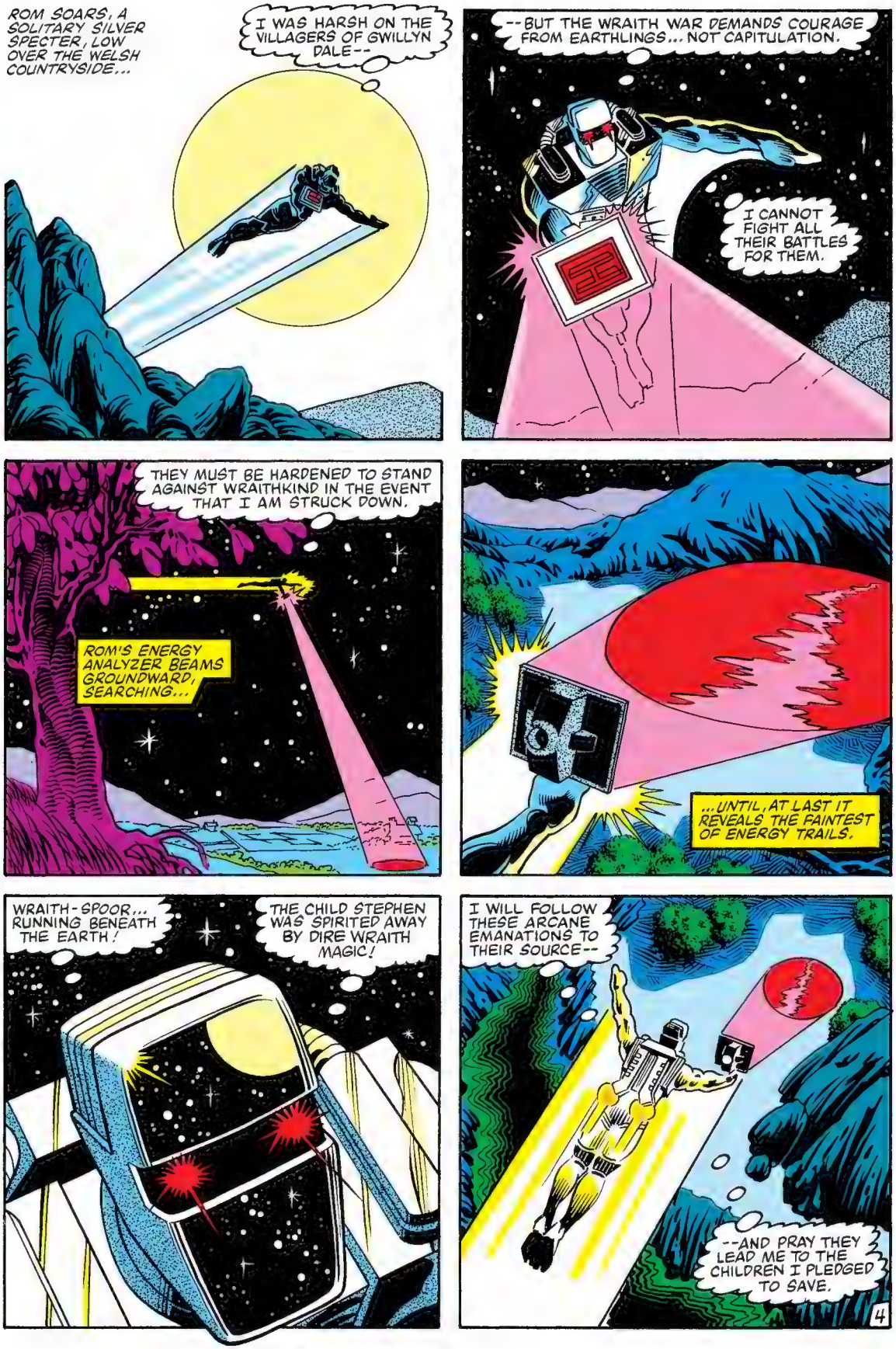
STan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO STORY / SAL BUSCEMA & AKIN & GARVEY ART / JIM NOVAK, LETTERS BEN SEAN, COLORS / ANN NOCENTI EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
IN DAYS OF OLDE, WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLDE!
MERE MOMENTS AGO, ROM SWORE TO SAFE-GUARD A WELSH CHILD FROM DIRE WRAITH DANGER.
THE WRAITHS DRAGGED THE CHILD DOWN IN-TO DARKNESS.
THE LAD, STEPHEN, COMPARED ME TO LEGENDARY EARTH KNIGHTS!
BUT WRAITH WIZARDRY DEFEATED ME, AND THE CHILD HAS BEEN SPIRITED FROM MY PROTECTION!
A TALE OF MAGIC & MYSTICISM IN THE MIGHTY MARVEL MANNER!
1


BUT I WILL PROVE TRUE TO MY PLEDGE AND SAVE YOUNG STEPHEN--
--THOUGH WRAITHKIND WILL SURELY PLACE PERILS BEYOND NUMBER IN MY PATH!
SOMETHING CATCHES ROM'S ATTENTION.
IT IS THE TOWNSPEOPLE OF GWILLYN DALE--WHENCE YOUNG STEPHEN HAILED.
WE'VE COME TA STOP THE MADNESS--TA KEEP OUR KIDS FROM THE EVIL!
WE'RE TOO LATE! STEPHEN'S GONE!
AYE, THE LAD IS GONE!
BUT WHY ARE YOU SO SURPRISED, HUMANS? DID YOU YOURSELVES NOT STAKE THE CHILD OUT UPON THIS LONESOME HILL--
"--AN OFFERING MEANT TO KEEP YOUR VILLAGE SAFE FROM THE DIRE WRAITH EVIL YOU FEARED!"
YES, WE WERE AFRAID, 'TIS TRUE!
BUT WE'VE OVERCOME OUR TERROR! WE'RE READY TA FIGHT TA SAVE OUR BABES!
THE ENEMY HAS ALREADY FLED WITH THE CHILD YOU SACRIFICED TO THEM. I WILL SAVE HIM, IF I AM ABLE.
FINE AN' FANCY WORDS COMIN' FROM SOMETHIN' AS UNLIKE ANYTHIN' I'VE EVER SEEN ON EARTH ERE NOW!
HOW'RE WE TO KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT THE EVIL?!
2


AM I ALWAYS TO BE DOUBTED BY THOSE WHOM I HAVE COME TO EARTH TO SAVE?
EXAMINE NOT MY MOTIVES, HUMANS, LEST YOU FIRST ANALYZE YOUR OWN!
THE CRIMSON BEAM OF ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER WASHES OVER THE VILLAGERS.
IN ITS LIGHT, THEY SEE THEMSELVES AS THEY ARE--SO TERROR-STRICKEN AND AFRAID...
...THAT THEY WOULD SACRIFICE THEIR OWN CHILDREN TO SAVE THEMSELVES. IT IS A TRUTH HARD TO LIVE WITH.
IF YOU KNOW ANY PRAYERS... I SUGGEST YOU PRAY FOR YOURSELVES!
I GO NOW, TO FREE--IF I CAN--YOUR CHILDREN FROM THE EVIL TO WHICH YOU HANDED THEM OVER.
3

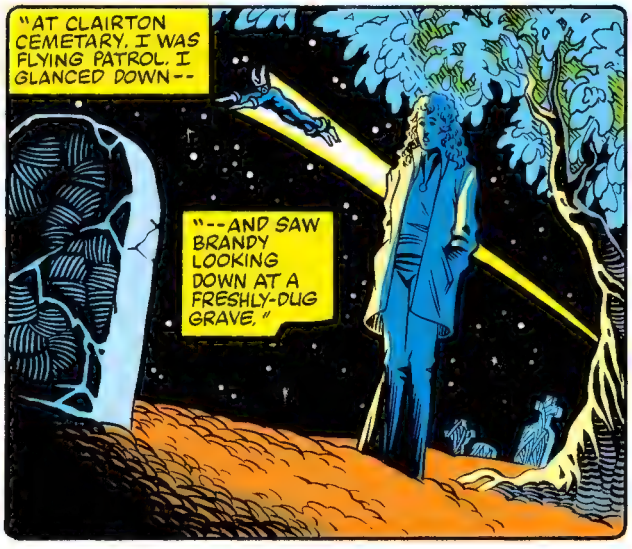

ROM SOARS, A SOLITARY SILVER SPECTER, LOW OVER THE WELSH COUNTRYSIDE...
I WAS HARSH ON THE VILLAGERS OF GWILLYN DALE--
--BUT THE WRAITH WAR DEMANDS COURAGE FROM EARTHLINGS... NOT CAPITULATION.
I CANNOT FIGHT ALL THEIR BATTLES FOR THEM.
THEY MUST BE HARDENED TO STAND AGAINST WRAITHKIND IN THE EVENT THAT I AM STRUCK DOWN.
ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER BEAMS GROUNDWARD, SEARCHING...
...UNTIL, AT LAST IT REVEALS THE FAINTEST OF ENERGY TRAILS.
WRAITH-SPOOR... RUNNING BENEATH THE EARTH!
THE CHILD STEPHEN WAS SPIRITED AWAY BY DIRE WRAITH MAGIC!
I WILL FOLLOW THESE ARCANE EMANATIONS TO THEIR SOURCE--
--AND PRAY THEY LEAD ME TO THE CHILDREN I PLEDGED TO SAVE.
4

AN OCEAN AWAY, THE SUN SHINES DOWN ON THE TINY HAMLET CALLED CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA.
IT IS A PEACEFUL PLACE, FOR IT HAS CLEANSED ITSELF OF WRAITHKIND.
THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT IT HAS SOLVED EVERY PROBLEM KNOWN TO PLAGUE HUMANKIND... SUCH AS THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS THAT MAY ARISE BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN.
WHY, HI'LO, STEVE.
MRS. CLARK, HAVE YOU SEEN BRANDY LATELY?
WHY, NO. HAVE YOU CALLED AT HER JOB?
SHE HASN'T BEEN AT WORK IN DAYS, AND HER LANDLORD HASN'T SEEN HER EITHER!
WELL, YOU KNOW HOW UPSET BRANDY WAS OVER ROM'S DEPARTURE FROM CLAIRTON, STEVE.
MAYBE SHE'S JUST GONE AWAY TO THINK THINGS OVER FOR AWHILE.
WITHOUT TELLING ME? YOUR DAUGHTER AND I ARE ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED, MR. CLARK!
I'M SURE BRANDY HASN'T FORGOTTEN THAT, STEVE.
WELL, I'M NOT SO SURE.
OH, JONATHAN, THESE ARE SUCH TROUBLED TIMES FOR LOVERS.
BRANDY AND STEVE MAY FIND EACH OTHER AGAIN...
I THOUGHT BRANDY'D FORGET ROM ONCE HE LEFT! I WAS WRONG!
HEY, STEVE!
5

TORPEDO! WHAT BRINGS CLAIRTON'S RESIDENT SUPER HERO DOWN TO EARTH?
I NOTICED YOU RUNNING FROM THE CLARK HOUSE.
ANYTHING WRONG?

NOTHING YOU CAN SOLVE WITH A TORPEDO-PUNCH, PAL.
IF I WERE MARRIED, I'D GO TO A MARRIAGE COUNSELLOR.
SINCE I'M NOT, MAYBE A DETECTIVE WOULD DO.
BRANDY'S MISSING!

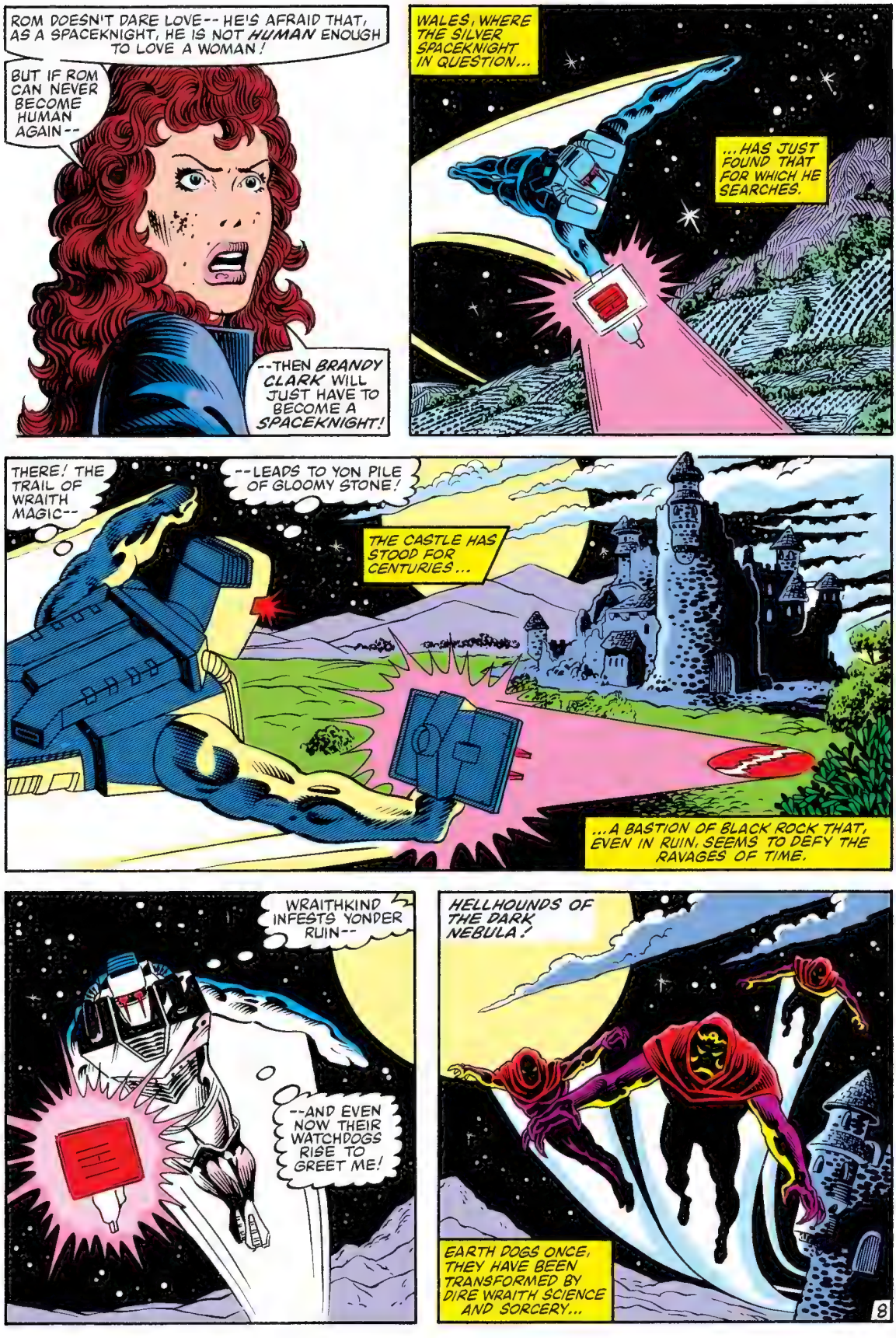
MISSING? BUT I JUST SAW HER LAST NIGHT!
YOU DID?! WHERE?!

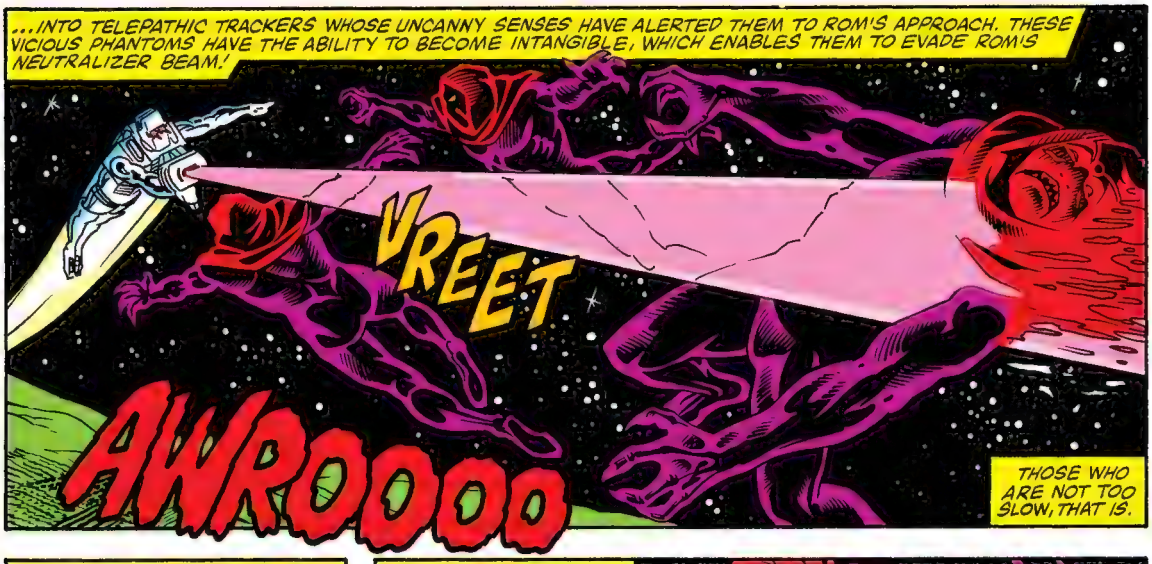

"AT CLAIRTON CEMETARY, I WAS FLYING PATROL. I GLANCED DOWN--
"--AND SAW BRANDY LOOKING DOWN AT A FRESHLY-DUG GRAVE."

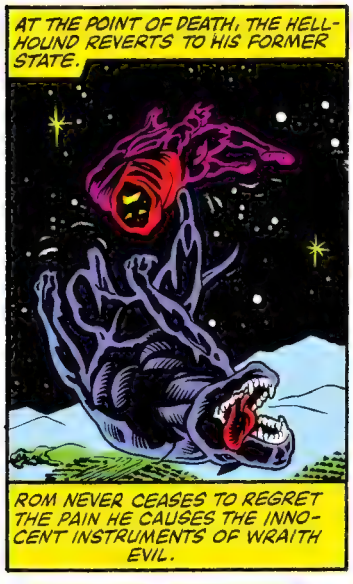
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT?! WHOSE GRAVE WAS IT, TORPEDO? TELL ME!
SURE.

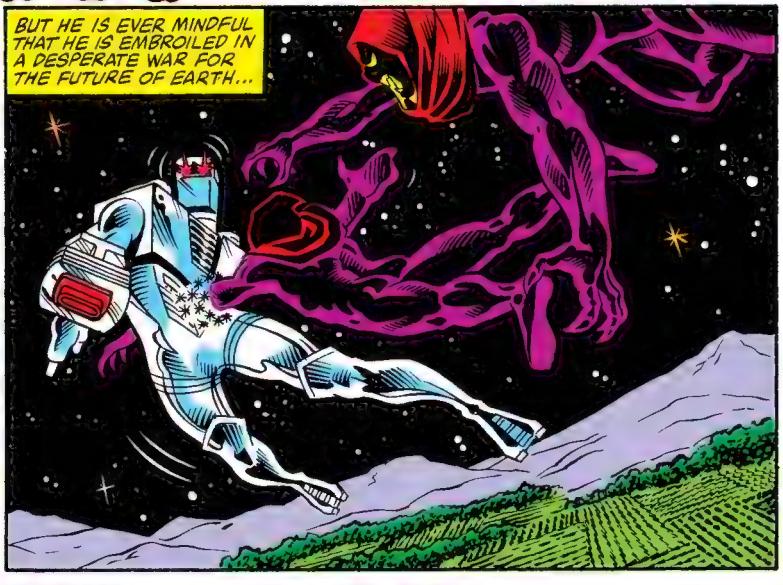
IT WAS THE GRAVE OF THE DEAD SPACEKNIGHT--THE ONE WHO SACRIFICED HERSELF OUT OF HER LOVE FOR ROM.
STARSHINE!
PITY POOR STEVE JACKSON, GENTLE READERS. HE SENSES THAT THINGS ARE SLIPPING AWAY FROM HIM.
6

CLAIRTON CEMETARY, AS DUSK BEGINS TO DESCEND...
STAR-SHINE
THE SOUND IS THAT OF A SPADE BITING EARTH.
BRANDY CLARK HAS CHOSEN A GOOD TIME TO DIG. THERE ARE NO MOURNERS IN THE CEMETARY NOW...
...AND THE GROUNDS-KEEPER HAS GONE HOME TO SUPPER.
SHE IS ALONE...
...WITH THE MORTAL REMAINS OF THE GOLDEN GALADORIAN SPACE-KNIGHT, STARSHINE!
EMPTY ARMOR, THAT'S ALL SHE IS NOW!
SKRASH
I MUST BE OUT OF MY MIND!
CRAZY OR NOT, THE YOUNG WOMAN HEAVES STARSHINE'S ARMOR OUT OF THE COFFIN...
...OUT OF THE ONLY-RECENTLY-DUG GRAVE, AND TOWARDS THE TRUNK OF HER CAR.
EITHER STAR-SHINE'S ARMOR IS LIGHTER THAN I EVER WOULD HAVE IMAGINED--
--OR I'VE BECOME FAR STRONGER THAN I WAS!
BUT THEN, STAR-SHINE'S SPIRIT DID SAY I WAS IMBUED WITH HER POWER!
SPACEKNIGHT POWER! POWER NEARLY AS GREAT AS ROM'S!
7

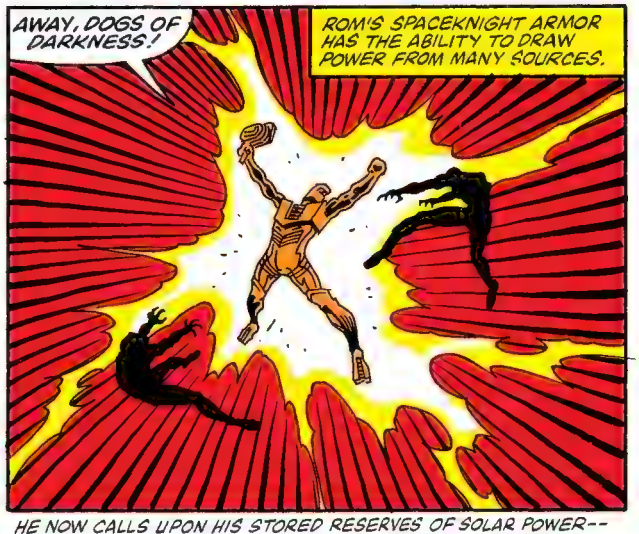

ROM DOESN'T DARE LOVE-- HE'S AFRAID THAT, AS A SPACEKNIGHT, HE IS NOT HUMAN ENOUGH TO LOVE A WOMAN!
BUT IF ROM CAN NEVER BECOME HUMAN AGAIN--
--THEN BRANDY CLARK WILL JUST HAVE TO BECOME A SPACEKNIGHT!
WALES, WHERE THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT IN QUESTION...
...HAS JUST FOUND THAT FOR WHICH HE SEARCHES.
THERE! THE TRAIL OF WRAITH MAGIC--
--LEADS TO YON PILE OF GLOOMY STONE!
THE CASTLE HAS STOOD FOR CENTURIES...
...A BASTION OF BLACK ROCK THAT, EVEN IN RUIN, SEEMS TO DEFY THE RAVAGES OF TIME.
WRAITHKIND INFESTS YONDER RUIN--
--AND EVEN NOW THEIR WATCHDOGS RISE TO GREET ME!
HELLHOUNDS OF THE DARK NEBULA!
EARTH DOGS ONCE, THEY HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED BY DIRE WRAITH SCIENCE AND SORCERY...
8

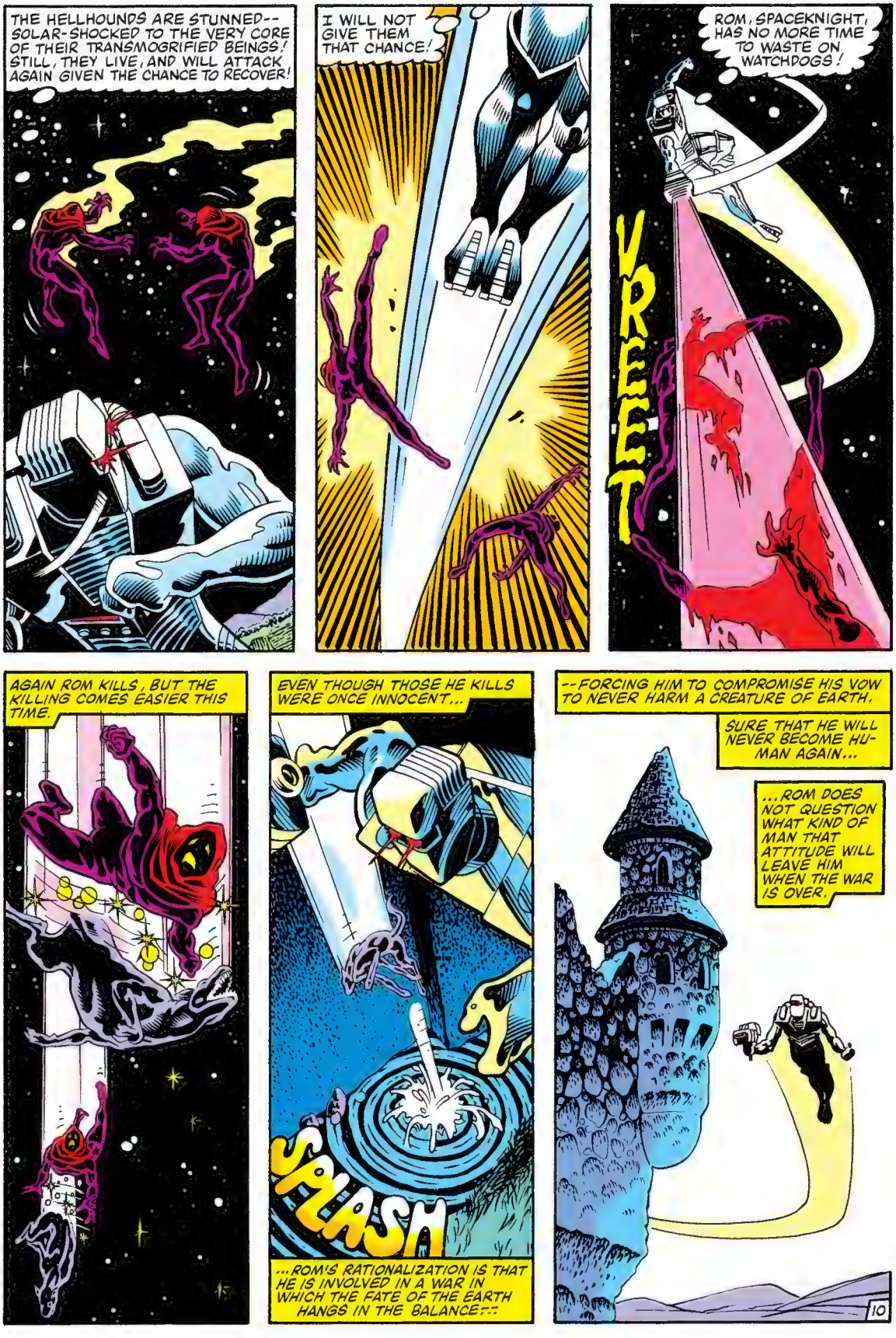

...INTO TELEPATHIC TRACKERS WHOSE UNCANNY SENSES HAVE ALERTED THEM TO ROM'S APPROACH. THESE VICIOUS PHANTOMS HAVE THE ABILITY TO BECOME INTANGIBLE, WHICH ENABLES THEM TO EVADE ROM'S NEUTRALIZER BEAM!
VREET
AWROOOO
THOSE WHO ARE NOT TOO SLOW, THAT IS.


AT THE POINT OF DEATH, THE HELL-HOUND REVERTS TO HIS FORMER STATE.
ROM NEVER CEASES TO REGRET THE PAIN HE CAUSES THE INNOCENT INSTRUMENTS OF WRAITH EVIL.

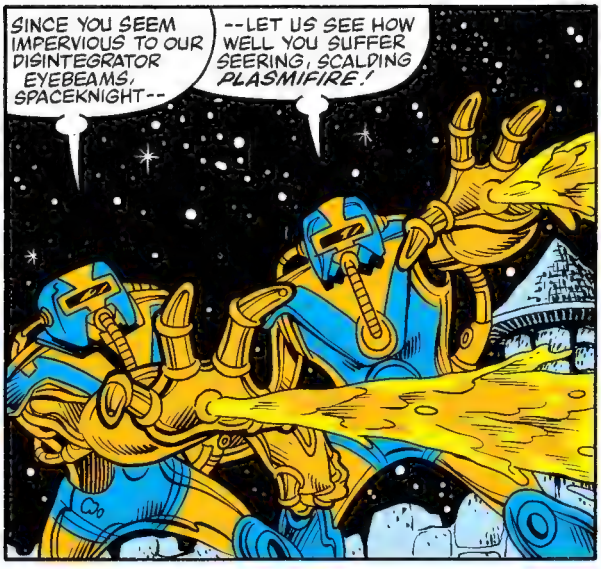

BUT HE IS EVER MINDFUL THAT HE IS EMBROILED IN A DESPERATE WAR FOR THE FUTURE OF EARTH...

...AND THAT THE HELL-HOUNDS ARE CAPABLE OF DISHING OUT PAIN AS GREAT AS ANY THEY RECEIVE!
HELLHOUNDS BECOMING INTANGIBLE-- PHASING THROUGH MY ARMOR!
THEIR ICY TOUCH DISRUPTS MY BIOCIRCUITS!


AWAY, DOGS OF DARKNESS!
ROM'S SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR HAS THE ABILITY TO DRAW POWER FROM MANY SOURCES.
HE NOW CALLS UPON HIS STORED RESERVES OF SOLAR POWER-- USING WARMTH AND LIGHT TO DRIVE THE CREATURES OF DARKNESS AWAY!
9


THE HELLHOUNDS ARE STUNNED--SOLAR-SHOCKED TO THE VERY CORE OF THEIR TRANSMOGRIFIED BEINGS! STILL, THEY LIVE, AND WILL ATTACK AGAIN GIVEN THE CHANCE TO RECOVER!
I WILL NOT GIVE THEM THAT CHANCE!
ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, HAS NO MORE TIME TO WASTE ON WATCHDOGS!
VREET
AGAIN ROM KILLS, BUT THE KILLING COMES EASIER THIS TIME.
EVEN THOUGH THOSE HE KILLS WERE ONCE INNOCENT...
SPLASH
...ROM'S RATIONALIZATION IS THAT HE IS INVOLVED IN A WAR IN WHICH THE FATE OF THE EARTH HANGS IN THE BALANCE...
--FORCING HIM TO COMPROMISE HIS VOW TO NEVER HARM A CREATURE OF EARTH.
SURE THAT HE WILL NEVER BECOME HUMAN AGAIN...
...ROM DOES NOT QUESTION WHAT KIND OF MAN THAT ATTITUDE WILL LEAVE HIM WHEN THE WAR IS OVER.
10

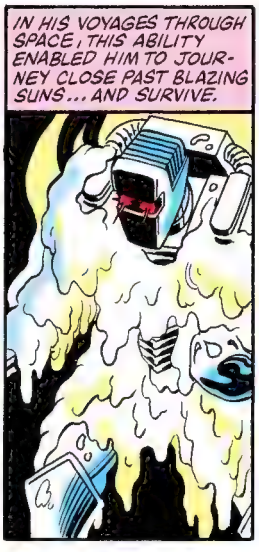
ON A STILL-STANDING TURRET OF THE RUIN... WATCHWRAITHS!
NOT LONG AGO ROM BATTLED ONE OF THESE AUTOMATON ASSASSINS FOR THE SAFETY OF CLAIRTON. HE ALMOST LOST.
HOW WILL HE FARE NOW AGAINST TWO SUCH LETHAL LEVIATHANS?
ASIDE, SERVANTS OF EVIL!
SKRAK
11


SINCE YOU SEEM IMPERVIOUS TO OUR DISINTEGRATOR EYEBEAMS, SPACEKNIGHT--
--LET US SEE HOW WELL YOU SUFFER SEERING, SCALDING PLASMIFIRE!

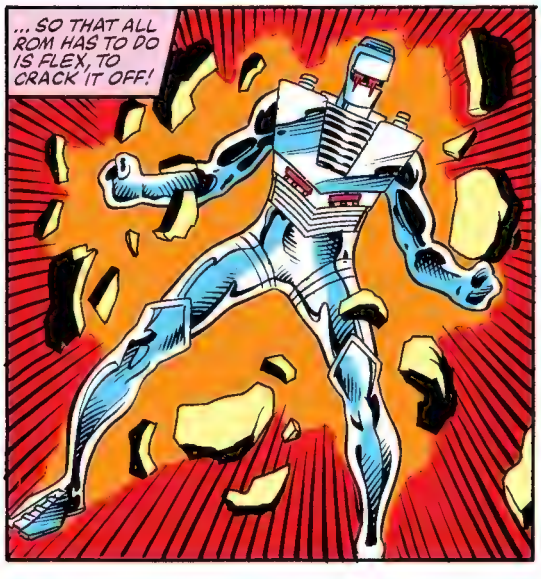
PLASMIFIRE! IT IS THE DARK NEBULA EQUIVALENT OF EARTHLY NAPALM!
SFROOSH!

THE PLASMIFIRE COATS MY ARMOR LIKE SOME INFERNAL GEL, BURNING ITS WAY INWARD--
--AS IF SEEKING TO IMMOLATE WHAT LITTLE HUMANITY I HAVE LEFT!

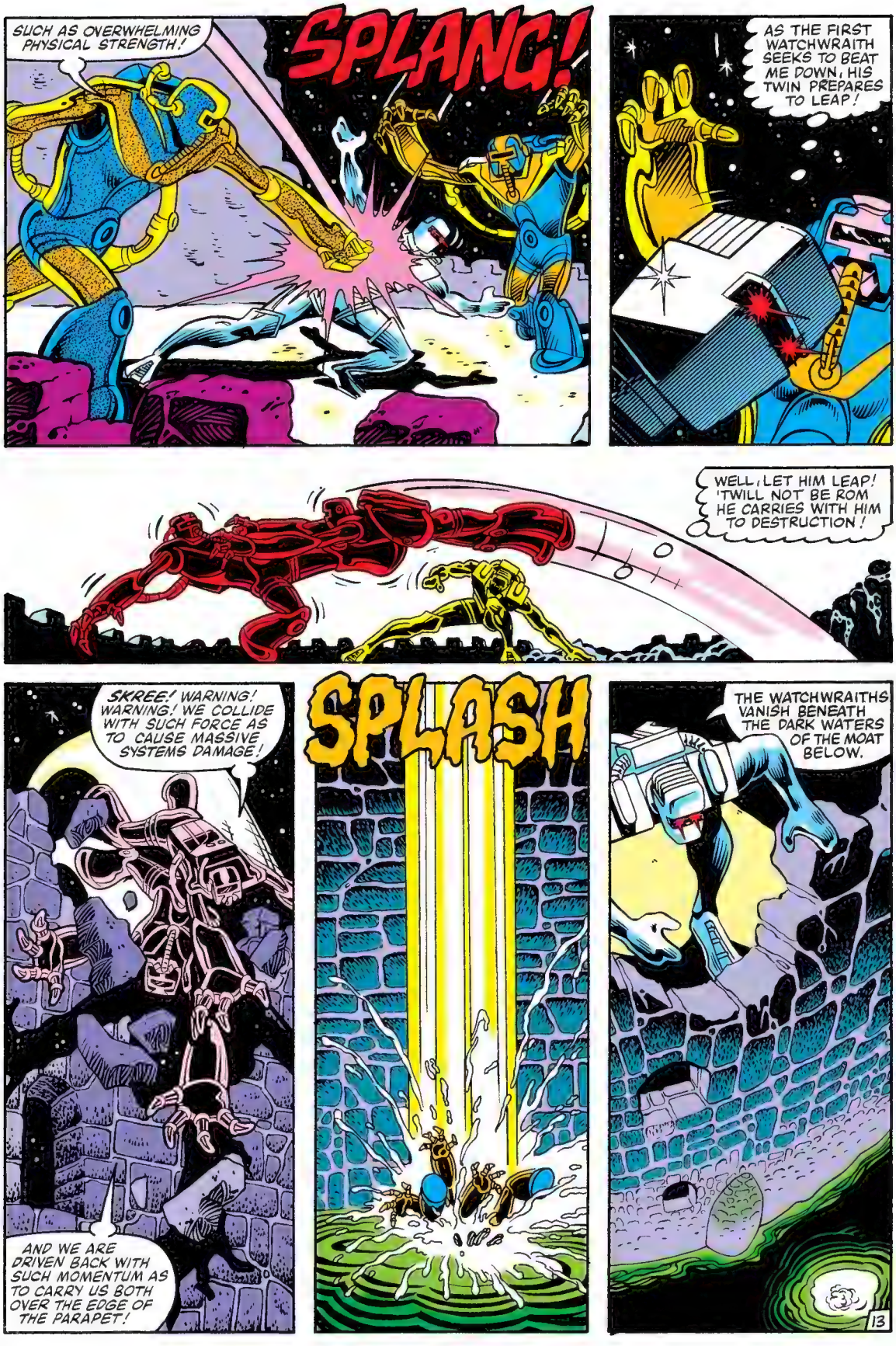
DESPERATELY, ROM'S CYBORG FINGERS SEARCH FOR A SWITCH MOUNTED ON HIS CHESTPLATE.
ACTIVATED, THE SWITCH IMMEDIATELY PLUNGES HIS SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR TO SUBZERO TEMPERATURES.

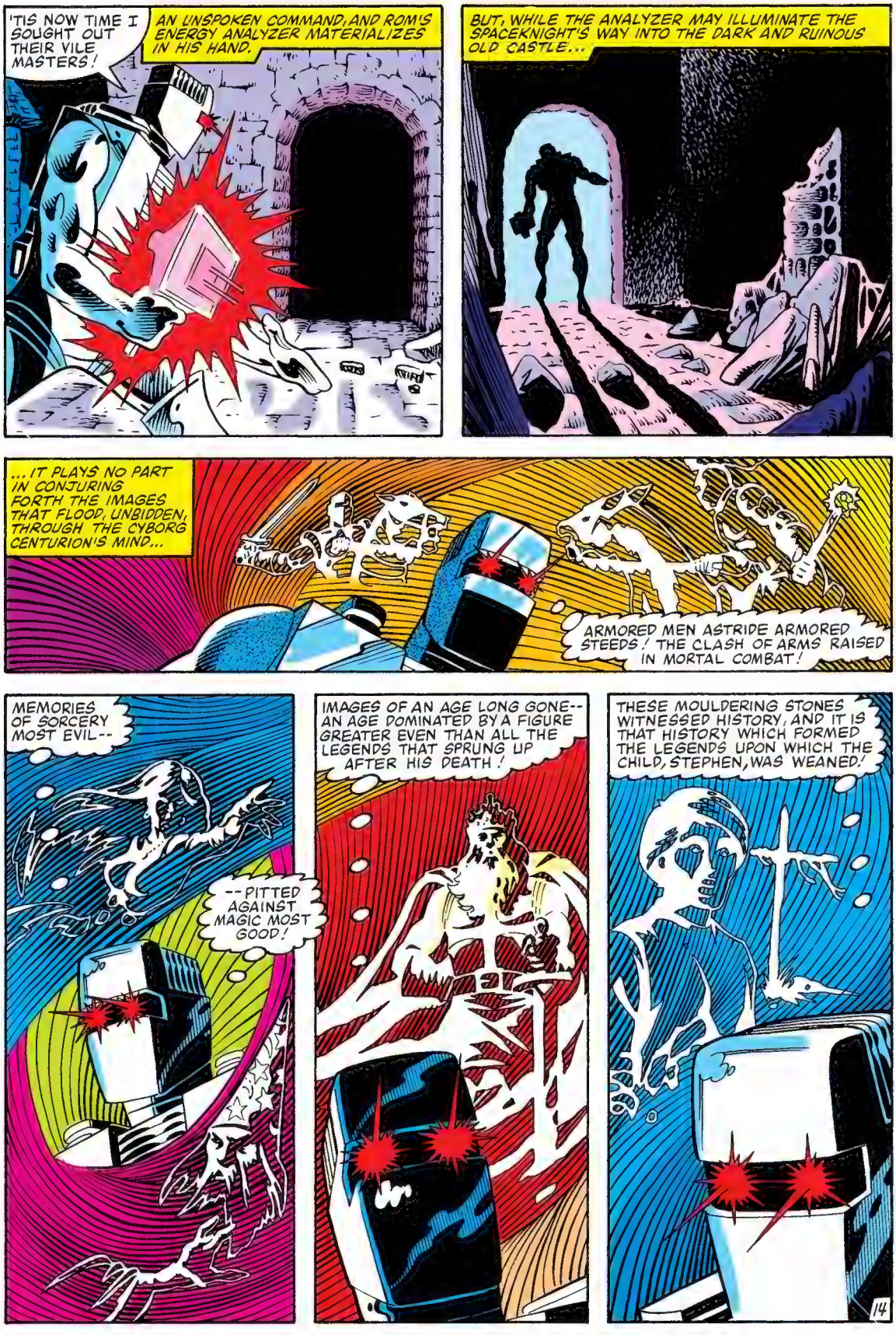

IN HIS VOYAGES THROUGH SPACE, THIS ABILITY ENABLED HIM TO JOURNEY CLOSE PAST BLAZING SUNS... AND SURVIVE.

NOW IT COOLS AND HARDENS THE FLAMING GEL...

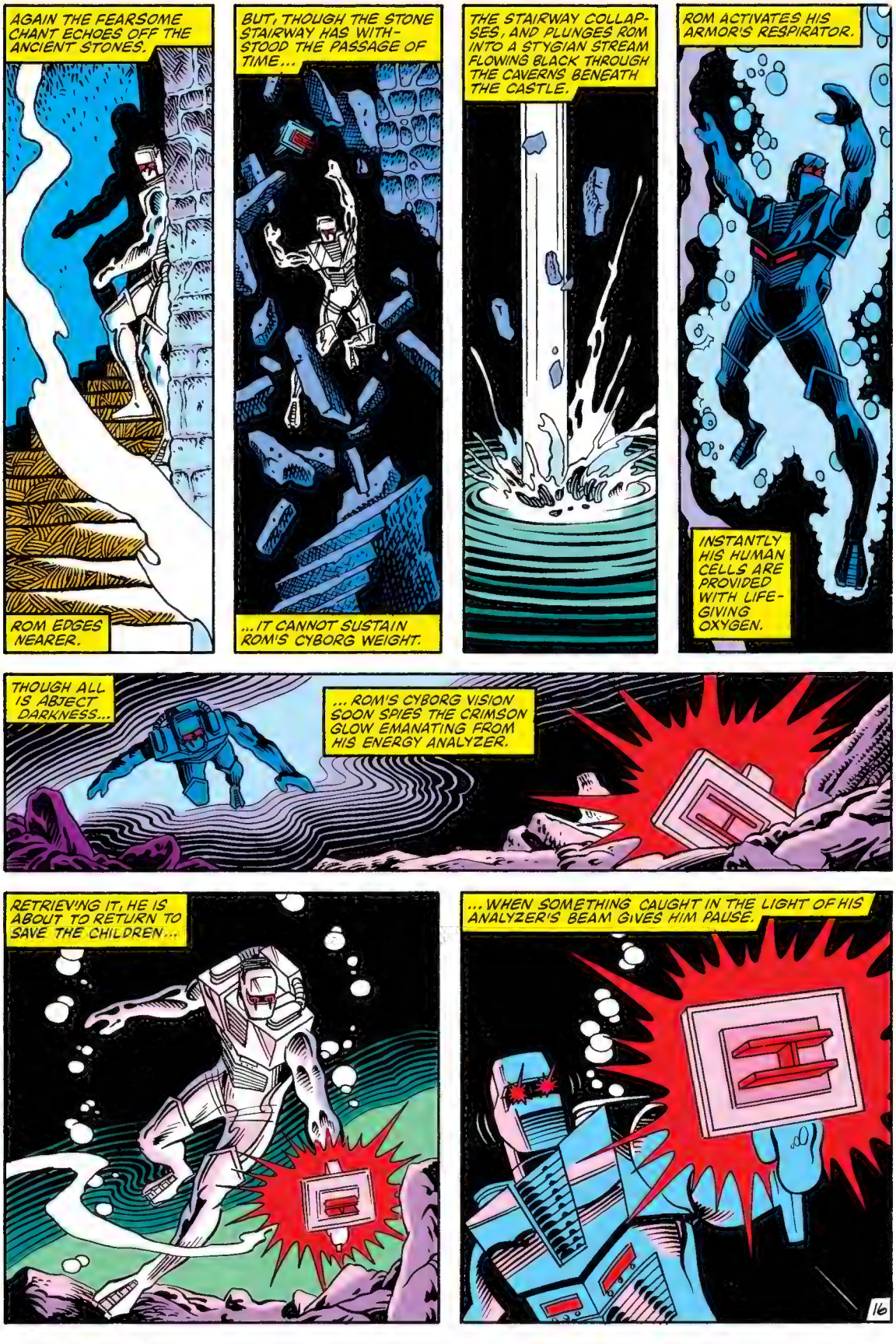

... SO THAT ALL ROM HAS TO DO IS FLEX, TO CRACK IT OFF!

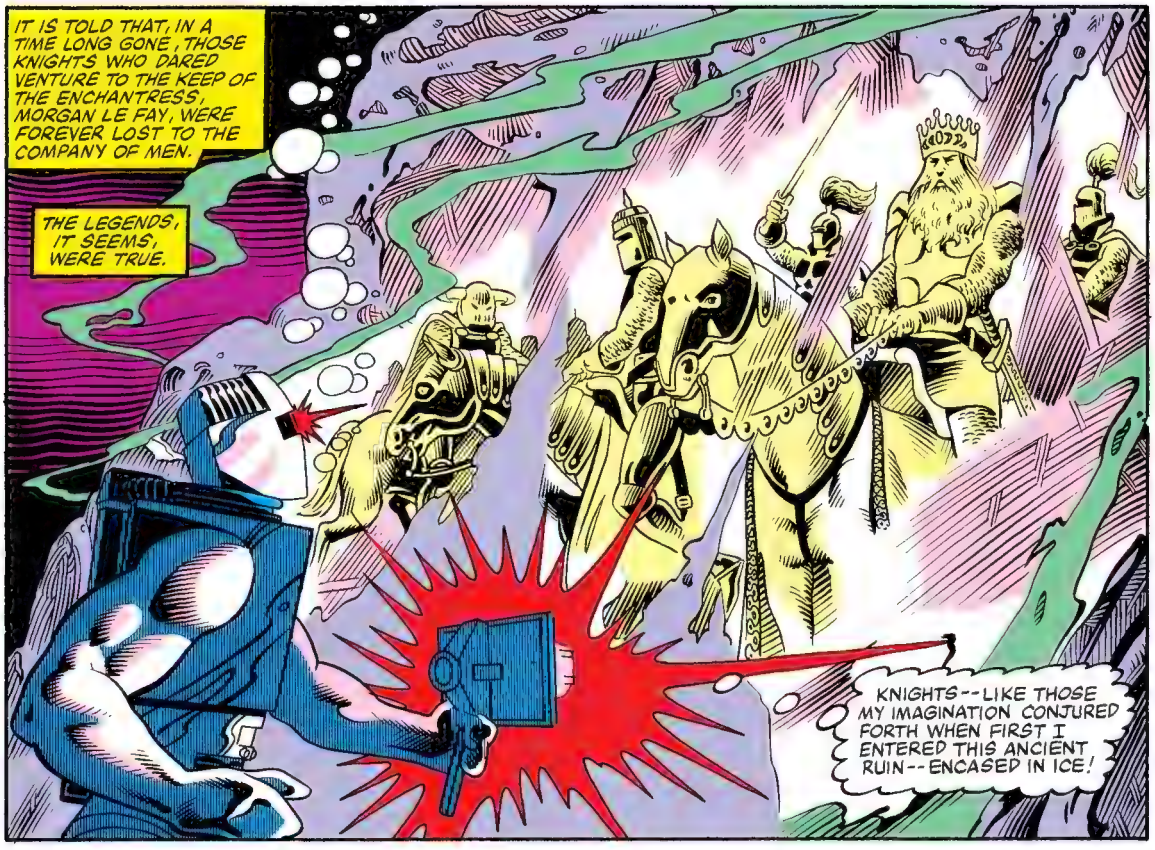
WE ARE CREATIONS OF DIRE WRAITH SCIENCE, SPACEKNIGHT!
IF OUR WEAPONS FAIL, OUR CREATORS IMBUED US WITH OTHER CHARACTERISTICS TO ENSURE YOUR DEFEAT!
12


SUCH AS OVERWHELMING PHYSICAL STRENGTH!
SPLANG!
AS THE FIRST WATCHWRAITH SEEKS TO BEAT ME DOWN, HIS TWIN PREPARES TO LEAP!
WELL, LET HIM LEAP! 'TWILL NOT BE ROM HE CARRIES WITH HIM TO DESTRUCTION!
SKREE! WARNING! WARNING! WE COLLIDE WITH SUCH FORCE AS TO CAUSE MASSIVE SYSTEMS DAMAGE!
AND WE ARE DRIVEN BACK WITH SUCH MOMENTUM AS TO CARRY US BOTH OVER THE EDGE OF THE PARAPET!
SPLASH
THE WATCHWRAITHS VANISH BENEATH THE DARK WATERS OF THE MOAT BELOW.
13

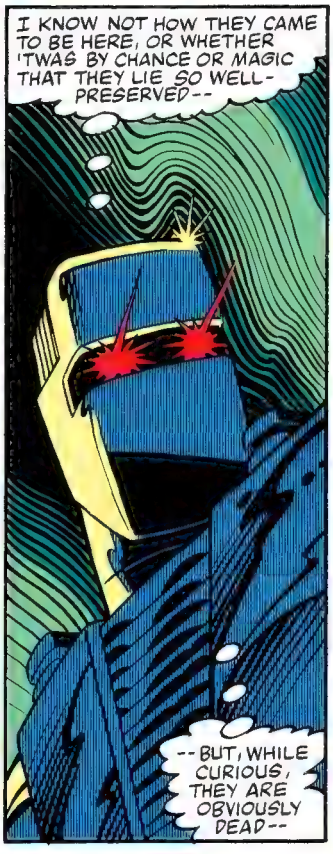

'TIS NOW TIME I SOUGHT OUT THEIR VILE MASTERS!
AN UNSPOKEN COMMAND, AND ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER MATERIALIZES IN HIS HAND.
BUT, WHILE THE ANALYZER MAY ILLUMINATE THE SPACEKNIGHT'S WAY INTO THE DARK AND RUINOUS OLD CASTLE...
...IT PLAYS NO PART IN CONJURING FORTH THE IMAGES THAT FLOOD, UNBIDDEN, THROUGH THE CYBORG CENTURION'S MIND...
ARMORED MEN ASTRIDE ARMORED STEEDS! THE CLASH OF ARMS RAISED IN MORTAL COMBAT!
MEMORIES OF SORCERY MOST EVIL--
--PITTED AGAINST MAGIC MOST GOOD!
IMAGES OF AN AGE LONG GONE-- AN AGE DOMINATED BY A FIGURE GREATER EVEN THAN ALL THE LEGENDS THAT SPRUNG UP AFTER HIS DEATH!
THESE MOULDERING STONES WITNESSED HISTORY, AND IT IS THAT HISTORY WHICH FORMED THE LEGENDS UPON WHICH THE CHILD, STEPHEN, WAS WEANED!
14

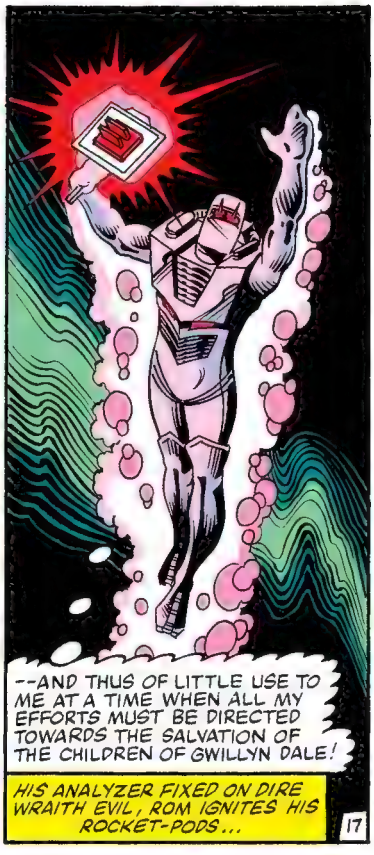
IF I AM TO BE TRUE TO THE LAD'S CONCEPTION OF ME AS THOSE LEGENDS PERSONIFIED--
-- THEN THIS LATTER-DAY KNIGHT MUST FIND AND RESCUE THE CHILD ERE HE COMES TO HARM!
ROM DESCENDS INTO DARKNESS...
...DRAWN BY THE MUTTERED CADENCES OF A MYSTICAL CHANT.
CALL DARK FIRES FROM 'NEATH THE GROUND, LET SMOKY TENDRILS RING US 'ROUND!
LET NO EARTHLY CHILD MAKE A SOUND, AS BY WRAITH MAGIC THEY ARE BOUND!
THE MOMENT DRAWS NIGH WHEN THE TIDES OF WAR WILL TURN IN FAVOR OF WRAITH-KIND--
--AND THESE CHILDREN OF EARTH WILL BE THE INSTRUMENTS OF OUR VICTORY!
YET THE TIME TO CAST OUR SPELL IS SHORT! ACROSS THE COSMOS, OUR HOME SYSTEM, THE DREAD DARK NEBULA, MOVES INTO ALIGNMENT WITH EARTH!
IN THAT TIME OUR WRAITH MAGIC IS AT ITS HEIGHT!
"WE HAVE ALREADY SUCCEEDED IN TRANSFORMING MINDLESS EARTH ANIMALS INTO SAVAGE SERVANTS WITH OUR SORCEROUS SKILL!
"WE WERE NEVER ABLE TO TRANSFORM HUMANS THEMSELVES IN A LIKE MANNER... UNTIL NOW!
"OUR FIRST ATTEMPT--A CONTINENT AWAY--FAILED WHEN ROM SLEW OUR SISTER!"*
*ROM #33--ARCHIVAL ANN.
BUT ROM WILL NEVER FIND US HERE, HIDDEN IN THIS VAST KEEP, ANCIENT FOUNT OF EARTHLY BLACK MAGIC!
AYE, 'TIS TOLD THIS CASTLE ONCE BELONGED TA THE SORCERESS MORGAN LE FAY! ALL KNIGHTS WHO WERE DRAWN HERE WERE LOST!
NOT EVEN A SPACEKNIGHT CAN NOW SAVE THE CHILDREN OF GWILLYN DALE!
THE CHILDREN ARE BOUND IN COCOONS OF ELDRITCH ENERGY, WITCH! BEGIN THE SPELL THAT WILL MAKE THEM OURS!
15


AGAIN THE FEARSOME CHANT ECHOES OFF THE ANCIENT STONES.
ROM EDGES NEARER.
BUT, THOUGH THE STONE STAIRWAY HAS WITHSTOOD THE PASSAGE OF TIME...
...IT CANNOT SUSTAIN ROM'S CYBORG WEIGHT.
THE STAIRWAY COLLAPSES, AND PLUNGES ROM INTO A STYGIAN STREAM FLOWING BLACK THROUGH THE CAVERNS BENEATH THE CASTLE.
ROM ACTIVATES HIS ARMOR'S RESPIRATOR.
INSTANTLY HIS HUMAN CELLS ARE PROVIDED WITH LIFEGIVING OXYGEN.
THOUGH ALL IS ABJECT DARKNESS...
...ROM'S CYBORG VISION SOON SPIES THE CRIMSON GLOW EMANATING FROM HIS ENERGY ANALYZER.
RETRIEVING IT, HE IS ABOUT TO RETURN TO SAVE THE CHILDREN...
...WHEN SOMETHING CAUGHT IN THE LIGHT OF HIS ANALYZER'S BEAM GIVES HIM PAUSE.
16

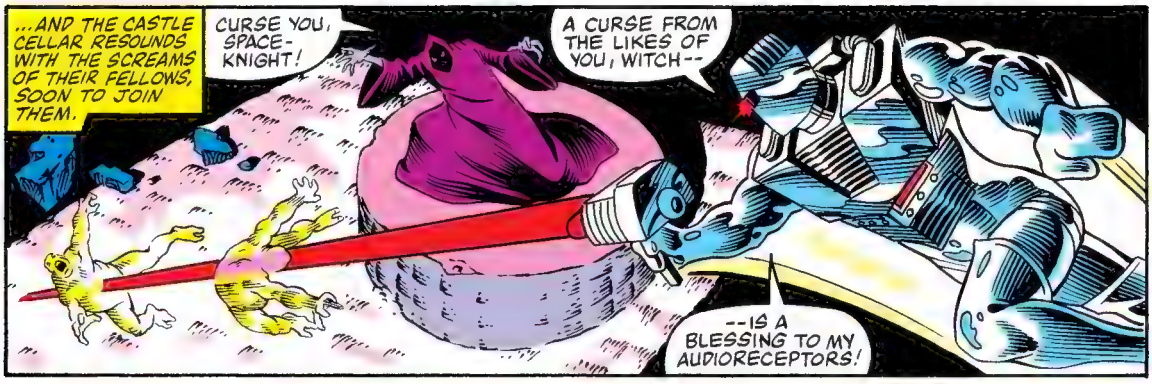

IT IS TOLD THAT, IN A TIME LONG GONE, THOSE KNIGHTS WHO DARED VENTURE TO THE KEEP OF THE ENCHANTRESS, MORGAN LE FAY, WERE FOREVER LOST TO THE COMPANY OF MEN.
THE LEGENDS, IT SEEMS, WERE TRUE.
KNIGHTS--LIKE THOSE MY IMAGINATION CONJURED FORTH WHEN FIRST I ENTERED THIS ANCIENT RUIN--ENCASED IN ICE!

AND AMONG THEM HE WHOSE SHINING VISAGE DID O'ERSHADOW THE GLORY OF ALL THE REST! A KING HE WAS, AND NOBLE!


I KNOW NOT HOW THEY CAME TO BE HERE, OR WHETHER 'TWAS BY CHANCE OR MAGIC THAT THEY LIE SO WELL-PRESERVED--
--BUT, WHILE CURIOUS, THEY ARE OBVIOUSLY DEAD--


--AND THUS OF LITTLE USE TO ME AT A TIME WHEN ALL MY EFFORTS MUST BE DIRECTED TOWARDS THE SALVATION OF THE CHILDREN OF GWILLYN DALE!
HIS ANALYZER FIXED ON DIRE WRAITH EVIL, ROM IGNITES HIS ROCKET-PODS...
17

...AND, SHATTERING UPWARD OUT OF THE CAVERNS BENEATH THE CASTLE'S CELLAR, THROWS THE WRAITHS' EVIL ENCHANTMENT INTO DISARRAY!
SO, WRAITHS, YOU SEEK SOMEONE ON WHOM TO PRACTICE YOUR ARCANE ARTS AND SINISTER SPELLS?
LEAVE THE CHILDREN OF EARTH BE--
--AND TRY YOUR MAGIC ON ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, IF YOU DARE!
VREET
YAAGHH! ROM'S NEUTRALIZER BEAM STRIKES ME! I FEEL MYSELF SLIPPING FROM THIS PLANE OF REALITY--
--AND AWAY INTO THE NEBULOUS NETHER-DIMENSION OF LIMBO!
THE WRAITHS' SCREAMS SOON FADE...
18


...AND THE CASTLE CELLAR RESOUNDS WITH THE SCREAMS OF THEIR FELLOWS, SOON TO JOIN THEM.
CURSE YOU, SPACE-KNIGHT!
A CURSE FROM THE LIKES OF YOU, WITCH--
--IS A BLESSING TO MY AUDIORECEPTORS!

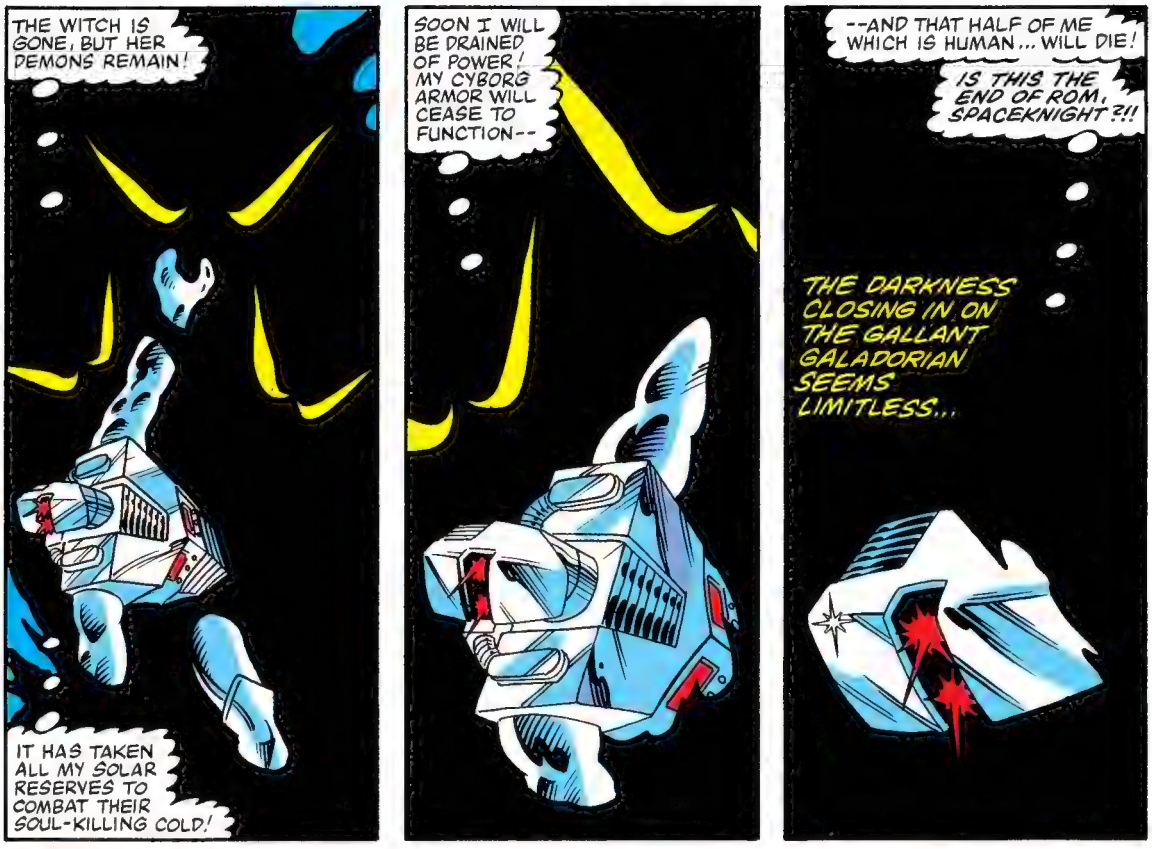
BE NOT SO CONFIDENT IN VICTORY, ROM! THE COSMIC ALIGNMENT WILL SOON BE NIGH--
--AND MY POWER AT ITS PEAK!

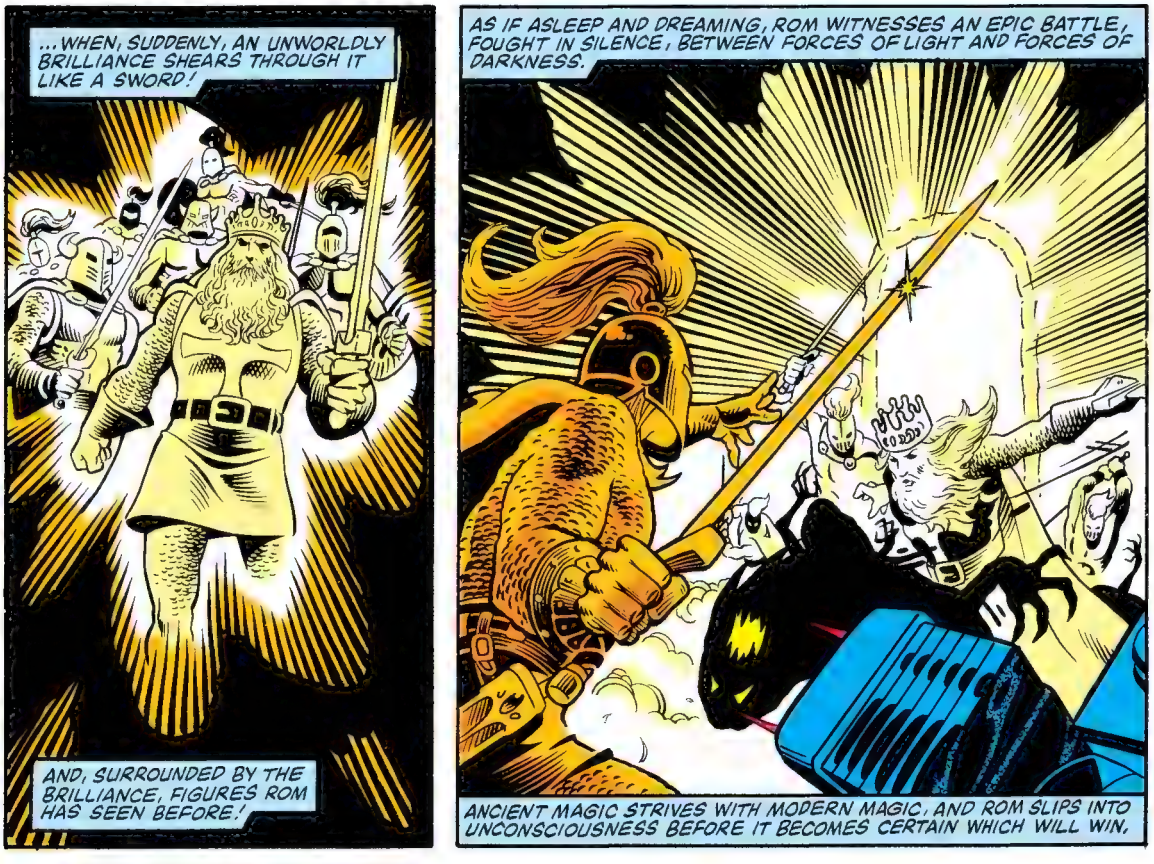
DARKNESS MORE ALL-ENCOMPASSING, MORE FINAL THAN DEATH REACHES OUT TO ENVELOP ROM.

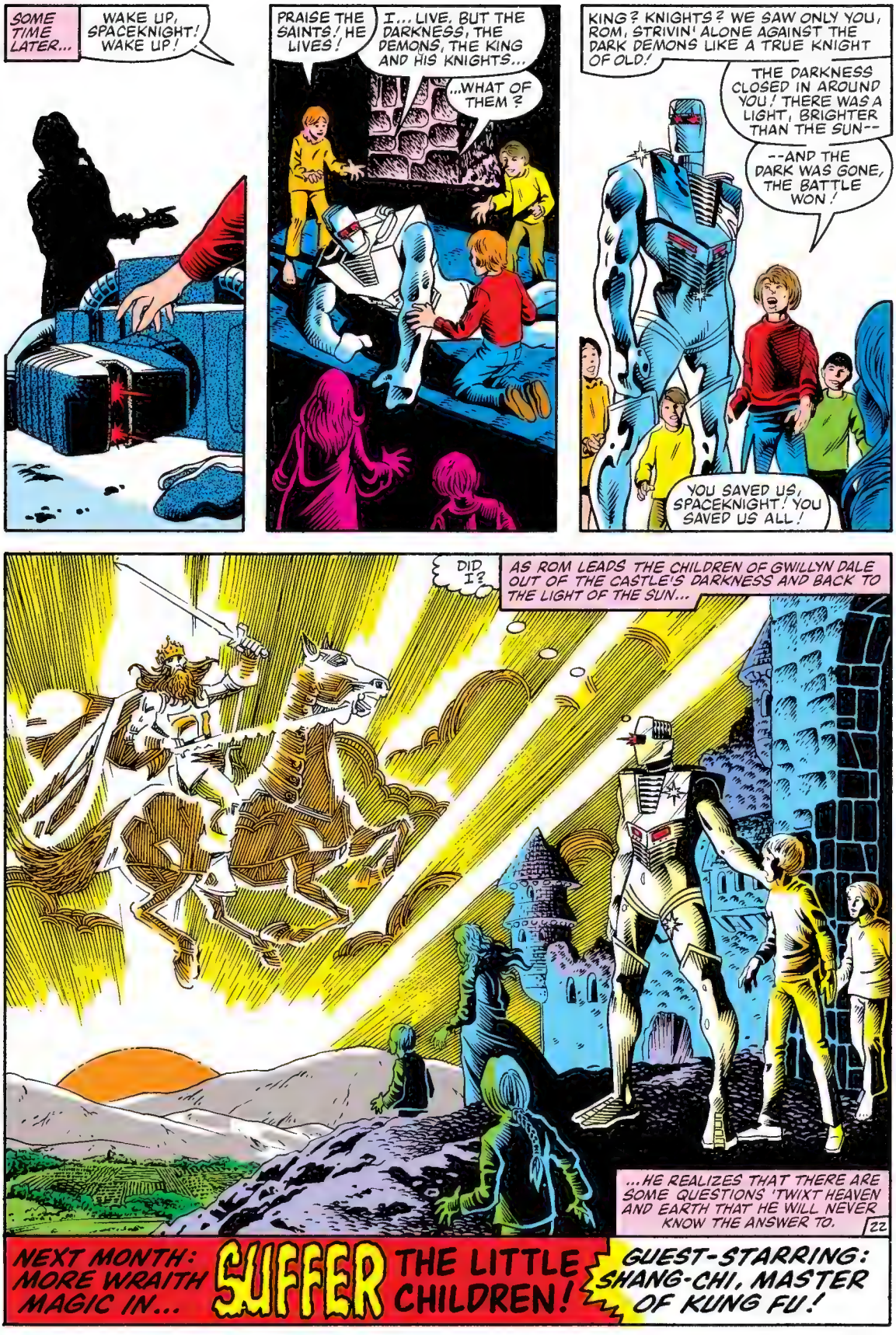
CHILLED TO HIS CYBORG SOUL, THE SHINING SILVER SPACEKNIGHT FALLS HARD TO UNYIELDING STONE.

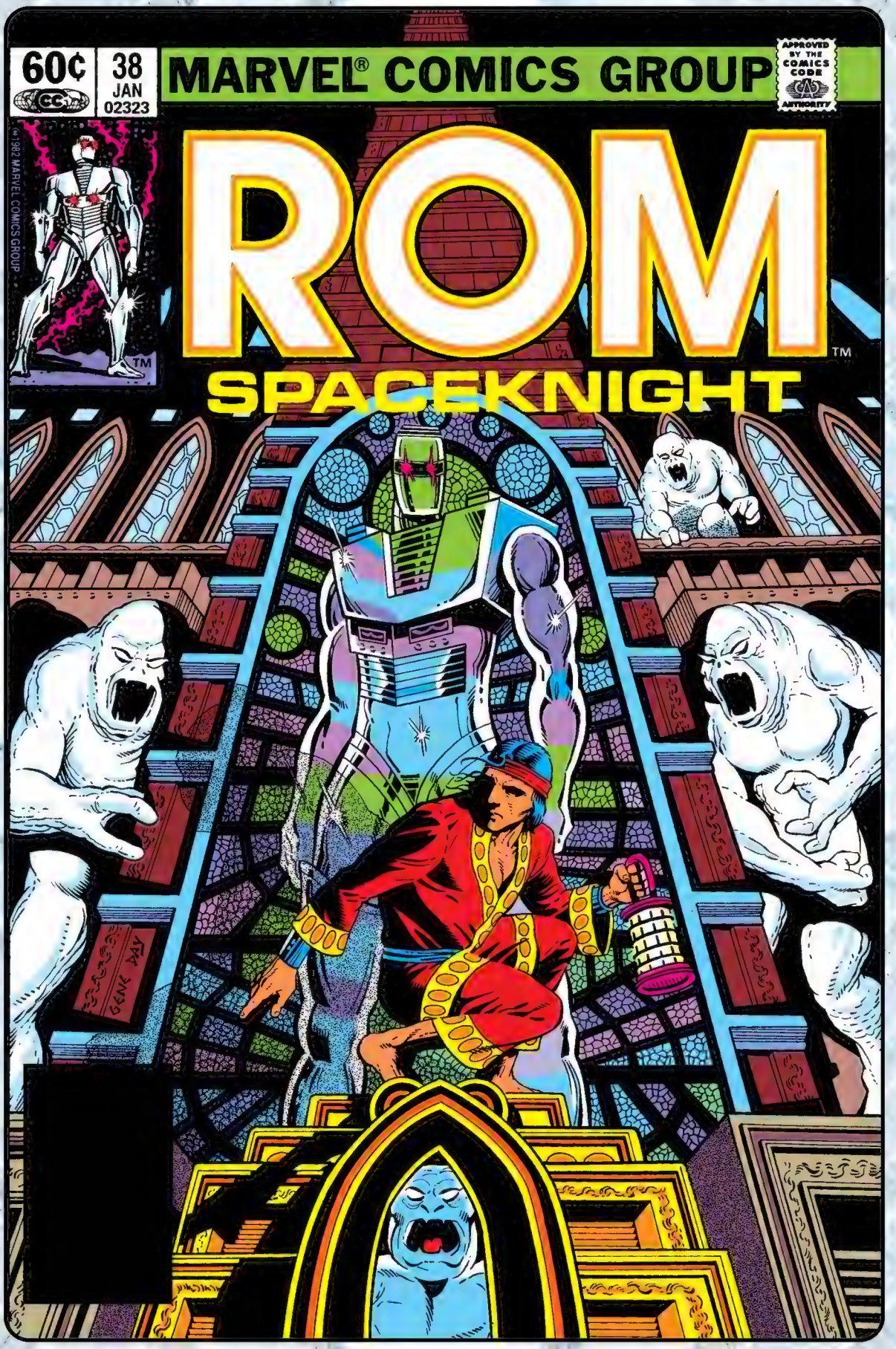
SENSING THAT THEIR ELDRITCH ENERGY JUST MAY BE SUFFICIENT, AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME, TO ENABLE THEM TO DEFEAT THEIR ANCIENT ENEMY...
...THE DIRE WRAITH CONJURATIONS CLOSE IN FOR THE KILL!
19

NOT SO EASILY WILL I SUCCUMB TO YOUR SOUL-NUMBING SHADOW, WRAITH-FIEND!
STEPHEN, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
THE KNIGHT WHO CAME TA SAVE US--HE'S BEEN SWALLOWED UP IN DARKNESS!
HOW CAN HE SAVE US IF HE CANNOT SAVE HIMSELF?!
THE WRAITH-WITCH SPOKE TRUTH! HER POWERS HAVE GROWN GREAT INDEED!
MY NEUTRALIZER WAS UNABLE TO NEGATE HER SPELL! HER DEMONS SWIRL AROUND ME!
DO YOU BEGIN TO KNOW FEAR AT LAST, SPACEKNIGHT--THE KIND OF FEAR MY RACE HAS EVER FELT FOR YOU?!
PERHAPS GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON CANNOT BANISH YOUR MAGIC-SPAWNED DEMONS, WRAITH WITCH--
--BUT THERE IS NOTHING TO PREVENT IT FROM BANISHING YOU!
VREET
NO! NOT WHEN I WAS SO CLOSE TO DEFEATING YOU!
NOOOOOO
20


THE WITCH IS GONE, BUT HER DEMONS REMAIN!
IT HAS TAKEN ALL MY SOLAR RESERVES TO COMBAT THEIR SOUL-KILLING COLD!
SOON I WILL BE DRAINED OF POWER! MY CYBORG ARMOR WILL CEASE TO FUNCTION--
--AND THAT HALF OF ME WHICH IS HUMAN... WILL DIE!
IS THIS THE END OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT?!!
THE DARKNESS CLOSING IN ON THE GALLANT GALADORIAN SEEMS LIMITLESS...


...WHEN, SUDDENLY, AN UNWORLDLY BRILLIANCE SHEARS THROUGH IT LIKE A SWORD!
AND, SURROUNDED BY THE BRILLIANCE, FIGURES ROM HAS SEEN BEFORE!
AS IF ASLEEP AND DREAMING, ROM WITNESSES AN EPIC BATTLE, FOUGHT IN SILENCE, BETWEEN FORCES OF LIGHT AND FORCES OF DARKNESS.
ANCIENT MAGIC STRIVES WITH MODERN MAGIC, AND ROM SLIPS INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS BEFORE IT BECOMES CERTAIN WHICH WILL WIN.


SOME TIME LATER...
WAKE UP, SPACEKNIGHT! WAKE UP!
PRAISE THE SAINTS! HE LIVES!
I... LIVE, BUT THE DARKNESS, THE DEMONS, THE KING AND HIS KNIGHTS...
...WHAT OF THEM?
KING? KNIGHTS? WE SAW ONLY YOU, ROM, STRIVIN' ALONE AGAINST THE DARK DEMONS LIKE A TRUE KNIGHT OF OLD!
THE DARKNESS CLOSED IN AROUND YOU! THERE WAS A LIGHT, BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN--
--AND THE DARK WAS GONE, THE BATTLE WON!
YOU SAVED US, SPACEKNIGHT! YOU SAVED US ALL!
DID I?
AS ROM LEADS THE CHILDREN OF GWILLYN DALE OUT OF THE CASTLE'S DARKNESS AND BACK TO THE LIGHT OF THE SUN...
...HE REALIZES THAT THERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS 'TWIXT HEAVEN AND EARTH THAT HE WILL NEVER KNOW THE ANSWER TO.
22
NEXT MONTH: MORE WRAITH MAGIC IN...
SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN!
GUEST-STARRING: SHANG-CHI, MASTER OF KUNG FU!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SPACEKNIGHT
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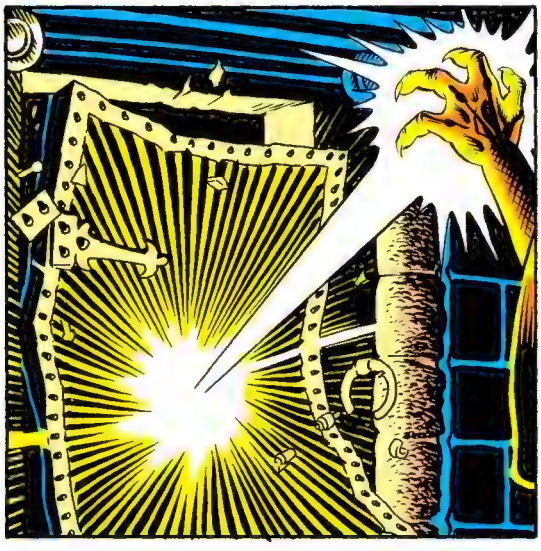
GENE DAY

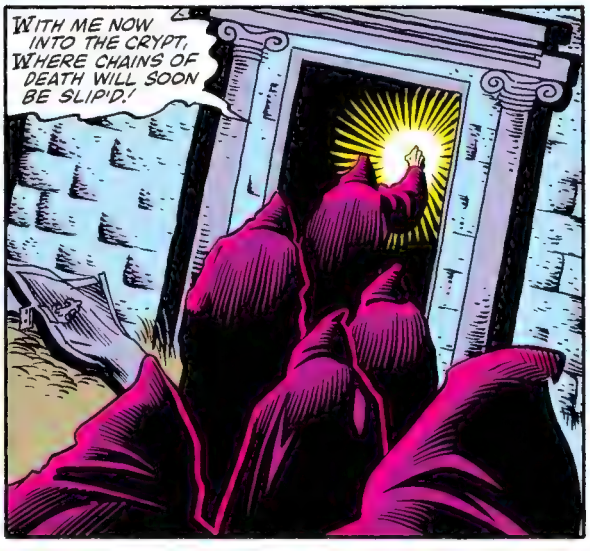
STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPTER / SAL BUSCEMA PENCILER / AKIN & GARVEY INKERS / JIM NOVAK, LETTERS BEN SEAN, COLORS / ANN NOCENTI EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN!
"MY NAME IS SHANG-CHI, LITERALLY TRANSLATED, IT MEANS 'THE RISING AND ADVANCING OF THE SPIRIT.'
"IT WAS BESTOWED UPON ME BY MY FATHER, FU MANCHU.
"FROM HIM I LEARNED THE SORROWFUL TRUTH THAT NOT ALL SPIRITS RISE, THAT NOT ALL SOULS ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF HUMAN HARMONY.
"THERE ARE MANY THAT WOULD RATHER DESCEND INTO DARK DEPRAVITY, AND DRAG ALL MANKIND DOWN BEHIND THEM.

"I DO NOT LIKE TO THINK THAT I HAVE GROWN SO ATTUNED TO EVIL THAT IT DRAWS ME FROM A DISTANCE.
"AND YET SOMETHING CALLED ME FROM STORMHAVEN CASTLE, FROM THE COMPANY OF MY FRIENDS AND THE ARMS OF LEIKO WU--

"--TO GAZE UPON A SECRET CEREMONY PERFORMED IN AN OLD VICTORIAN CHURCHYARD.

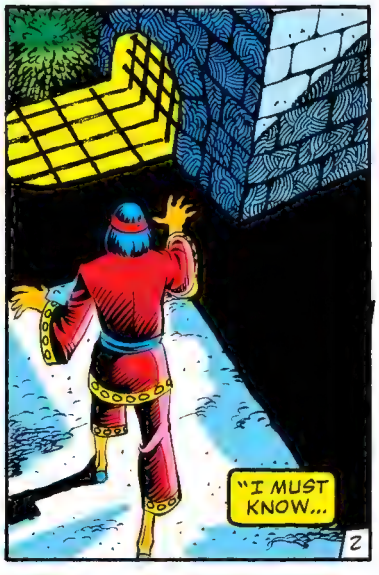
WRAPPED IN SHADOWS OF THE NIGHT, LET US SHOW OUR MYSTIC MIGHT!

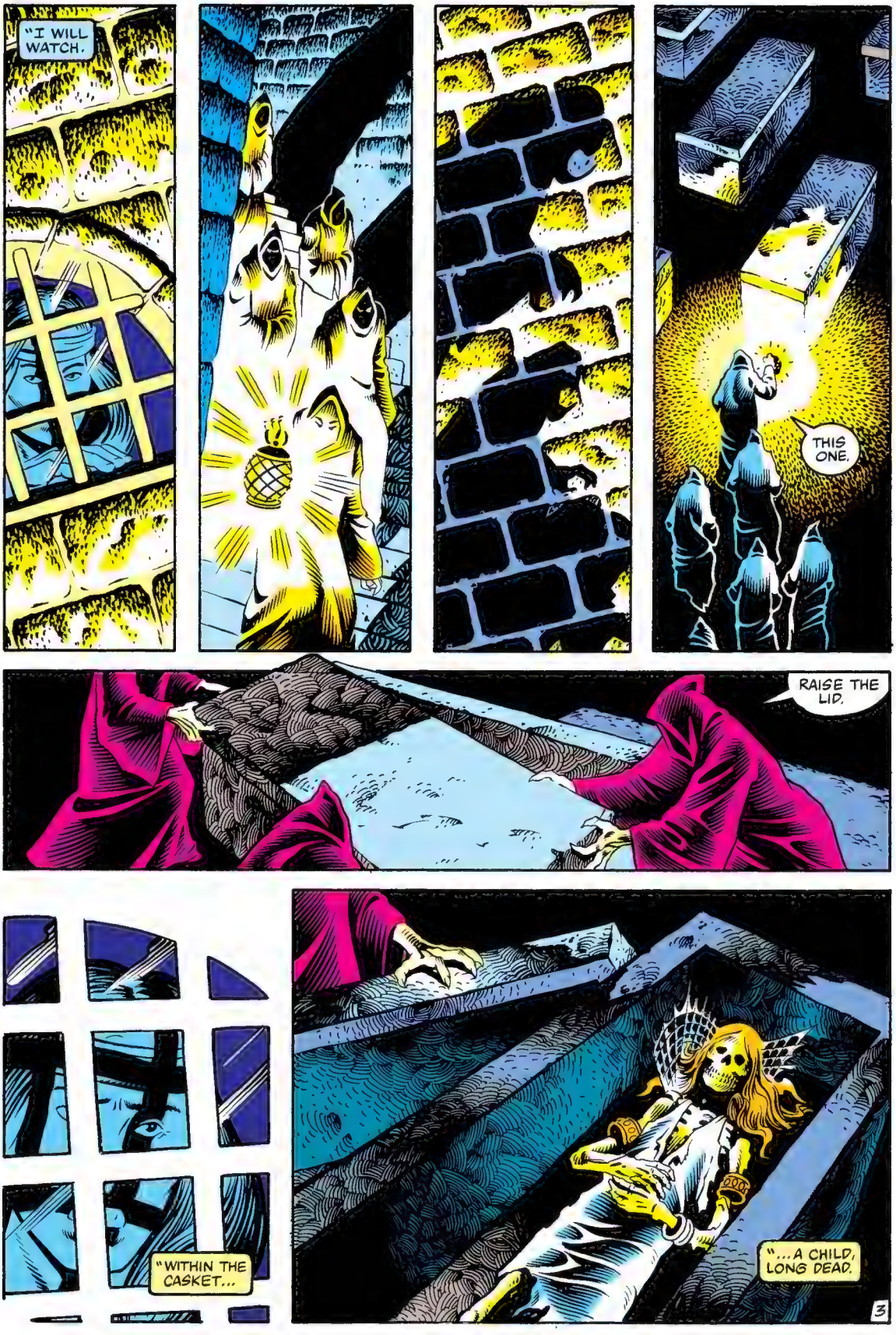



WITH ME NOW INTO THE CRYPT, WHERE CHAINS OF DEATH WILL SOON BE SLIP'D!

"THESE ARE NOT MEN.

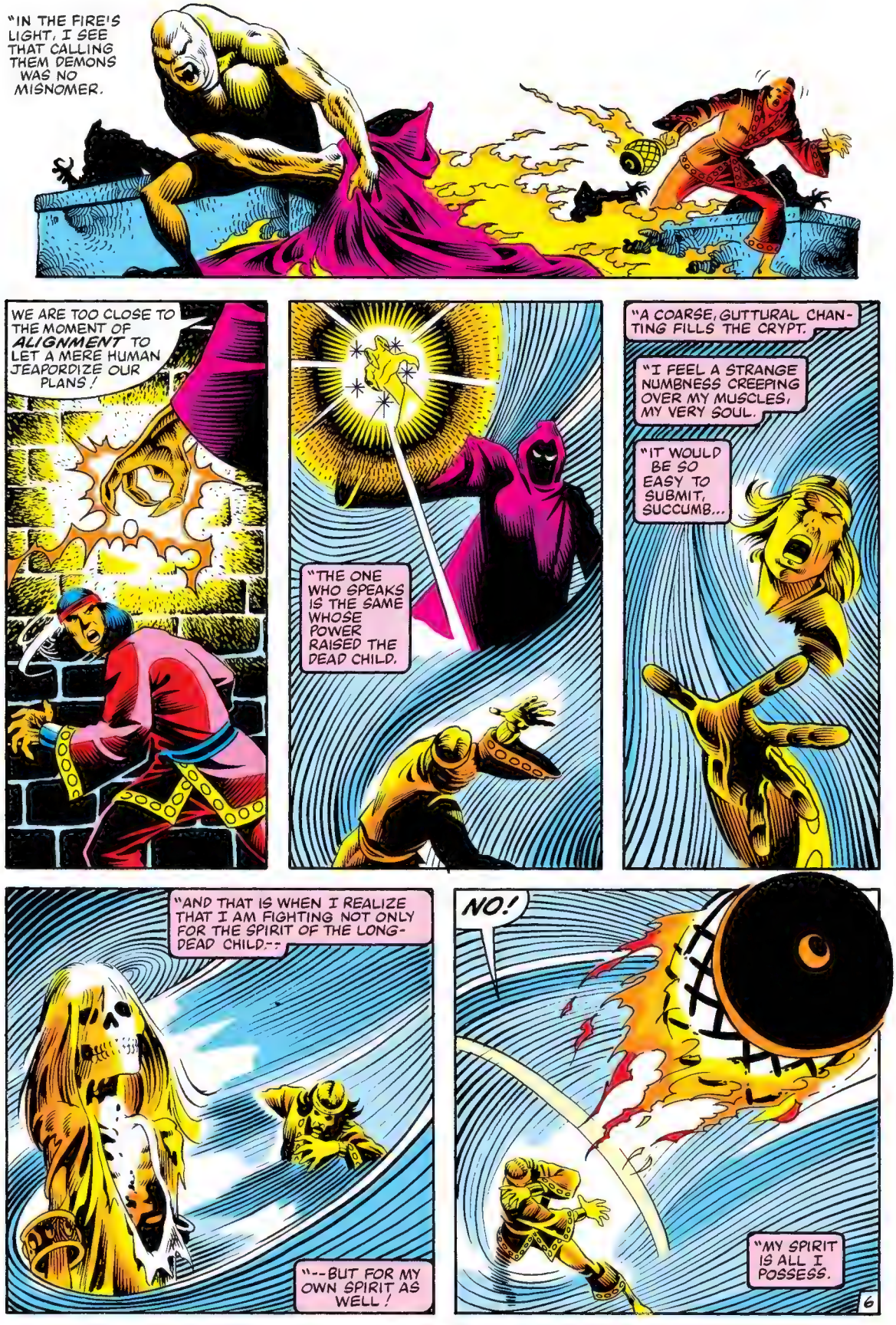
"WHAT, THEN, ARE THEY?

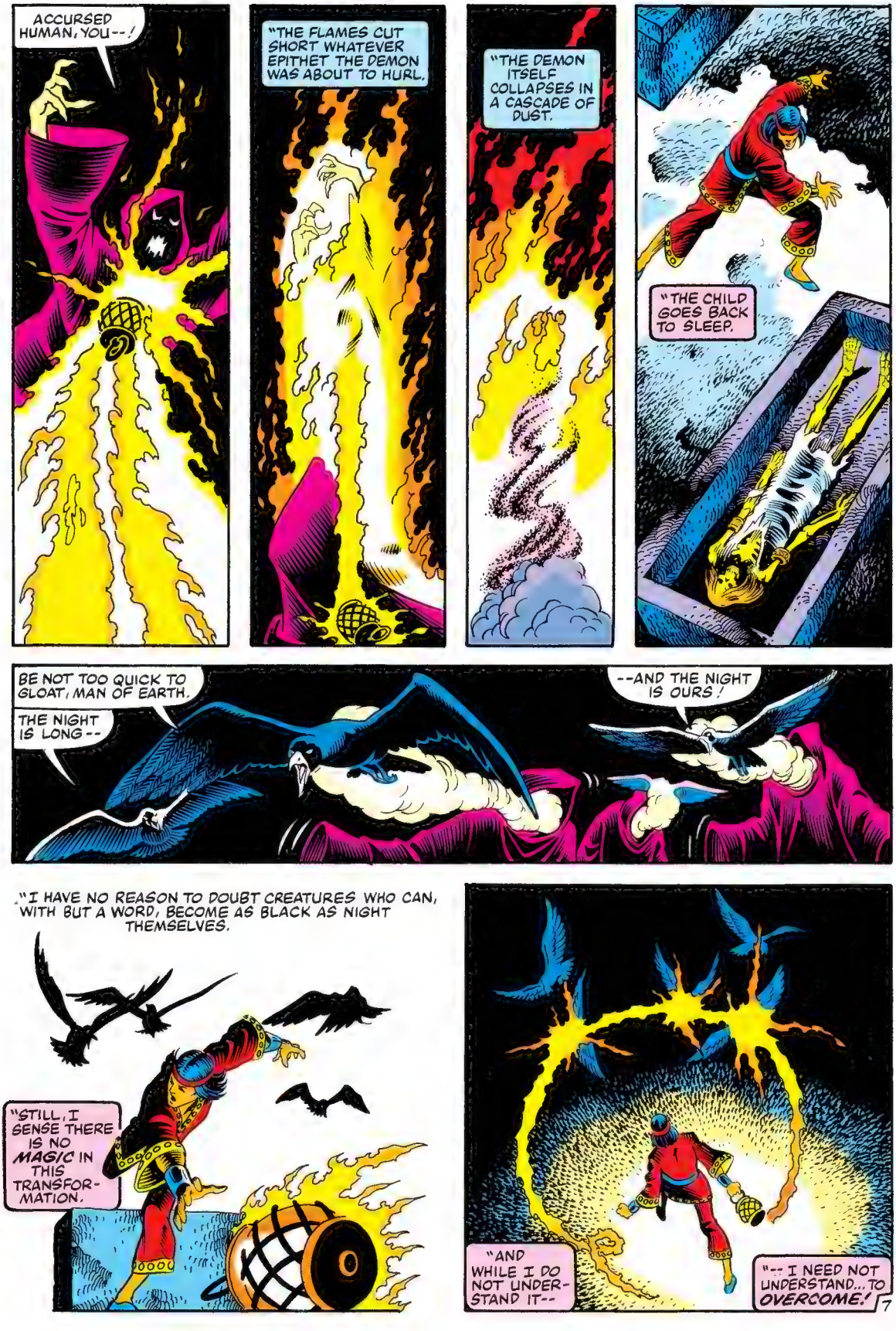

"I MUST KNOW...
2


"I WILL WATCH.
THIS ONE.
RAISE THE LID.
"WITHIN THE CASKET...
"...A CHILD, LONG DEAD.
3

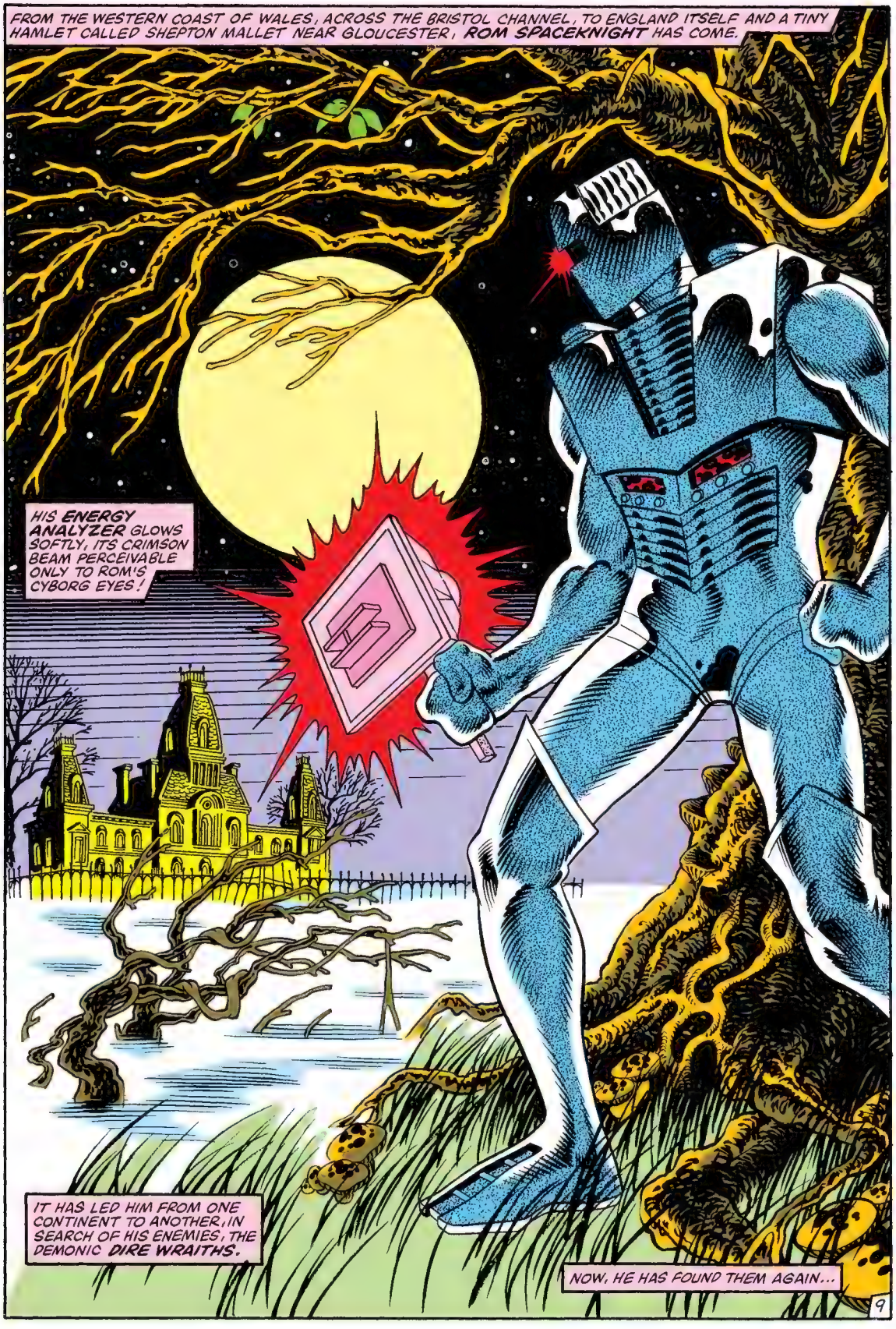
CHILD LOST IN SHROUDS OF SLEEP, GIVEN TO THE EARTH TO KEEP, DEAD, DECAYING HOUR BY HOUR--
"I FEAR WHAT I AM ABOUT TO SEE.
--RISE UP, PROOF OF DIRE WRAITH POWER.
"THE HAND! DID IT MOVE? DID IT?!
RISE!
WHO... HAS... CALLED... ME?
"THE VOICE IS A SIGH FROM BEYOND THE PALE OF LIFE; THE DRY RUSTLING OF DEAD LEAVES.
"IT IS A CHILD'S VOICE, THAT OF A LITTLE GIRL TORN FROM THOSE WHO LOVED HER, ENTOMBED AND LAID TO MOURNFUL REST.
WHY... HAVE... YOU... CALLED... ME... BACK?
"NOW HER SLUMBER HAS BEEN SHATTERED!
4

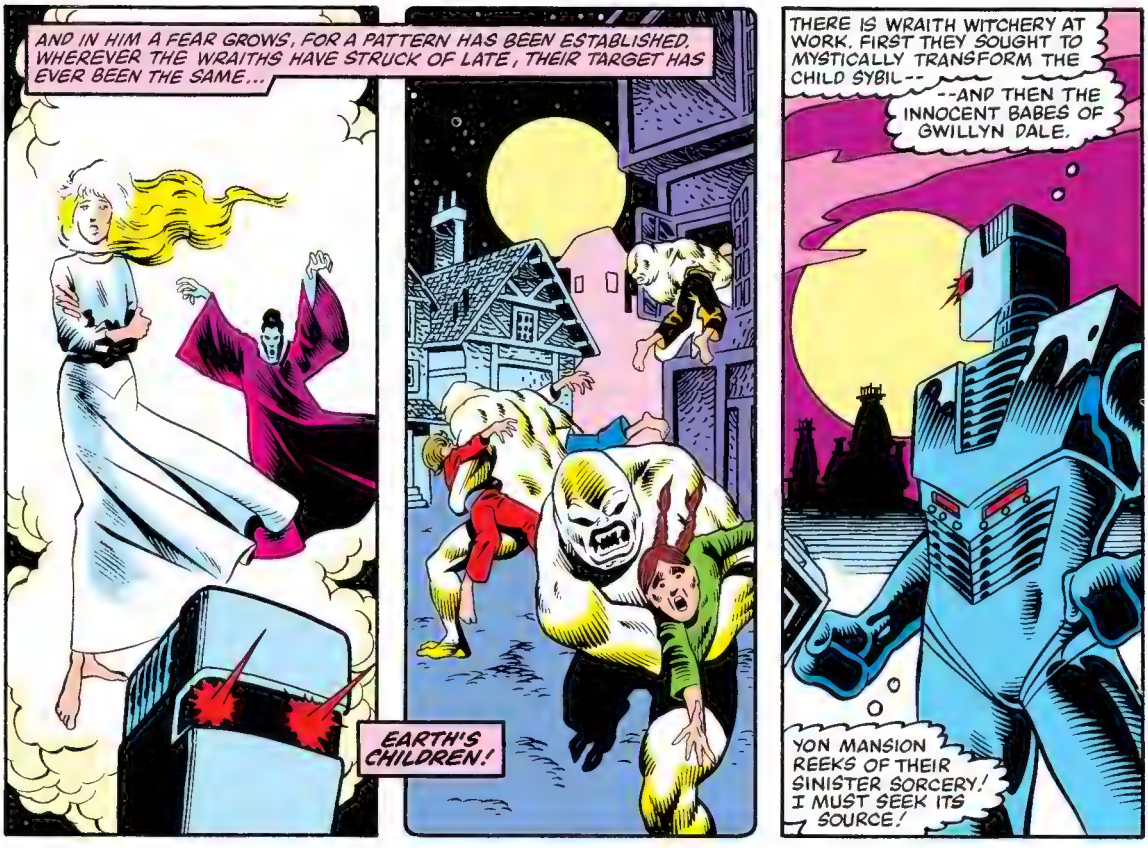
"THE CHILD'S SPIRIT HAD RISEN, HAD ADVANCED.
"I SENSE HER HORROR THAT IT HAS BEEN DRAGGED BACK TO EARTH.
WHO...?!
YOU ARE NOT HUMAN!
"THEY LAUGH.
"IT IS AN UNEARTHLY SOUND.
"IT QUICKLY TURNS TO SCREAMS.
STOP HIM, WRAITH BROTHERS! HE GOES FOR THE CHILD!
"YES, THE CHILD...
PLEASE... RELEASE... ME.
"I WOULD RELEASE HER! I WOULD SEND HER BACK THROUGH THE LONG TUNNEL OF LIGHT SAID TO EXTEND BEYOND LIFE--
"--WHERE HER SPIRIT COULD BE REUNITED WITH THOSE SPIRITS THAT LOVE HER!
"BUT THE DEMONS WHO DRAGGED HER BACK FROM DEATH BAR MY WAY!
MY ROBES! THEY BURN!
"THE DEMON WHIRLS, FANNING THE FLAMES EVEN HOTTER.
5

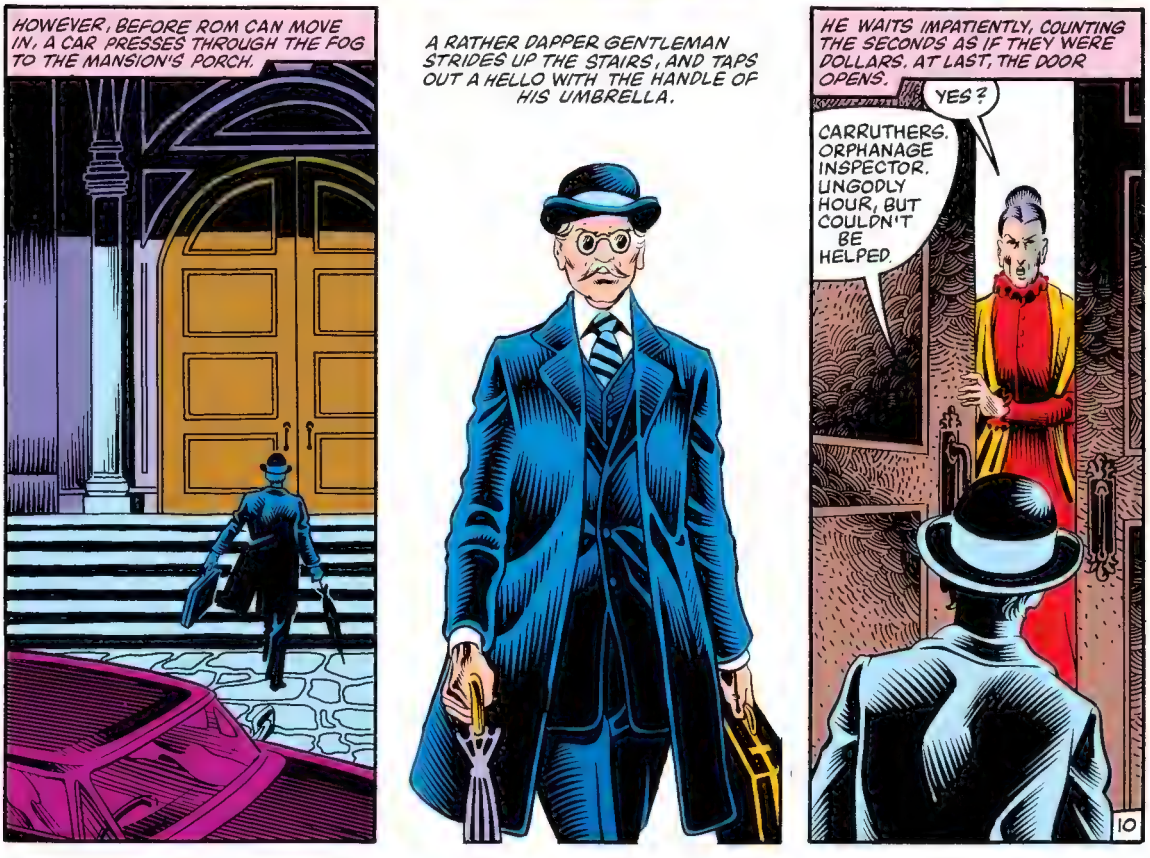

"IN THE FIRE'S LIGHT, I SEE THAT CALLING THEM DEMONS WAS NO MISNOMER.
WE ARE TOO CLOSE TO THE MOMENT OF ALIGNMENT TO LET A MERE HUMAN JEAPORDIZE OUR PLANS!
"THE ONE WHO SPEAKS IS THE SAME WHOSE POWER RAISED THE DEAD CHILD.
"A COARSE, GUTTURAL CHANTING FILLS THE CRYPT.
"I FEEL A STRANGE NUMBNESS CREEPING OVER MY MUSCLES, MY VERY SOUL.
"IT WOULD BE SO EASY TO SUBMIT, SUCCUMB...
"AND THAT IS WHEN I REALIZE THAT I AM FIGHTING NOT ONLY FOR THE SPIRIT OF THE LONG-DEAD CHILD--
"--BUT FOR MY OWN SPIRIT AS WELL!
NO!
"MY SPIRIT IS ALL I POSSESS.
6

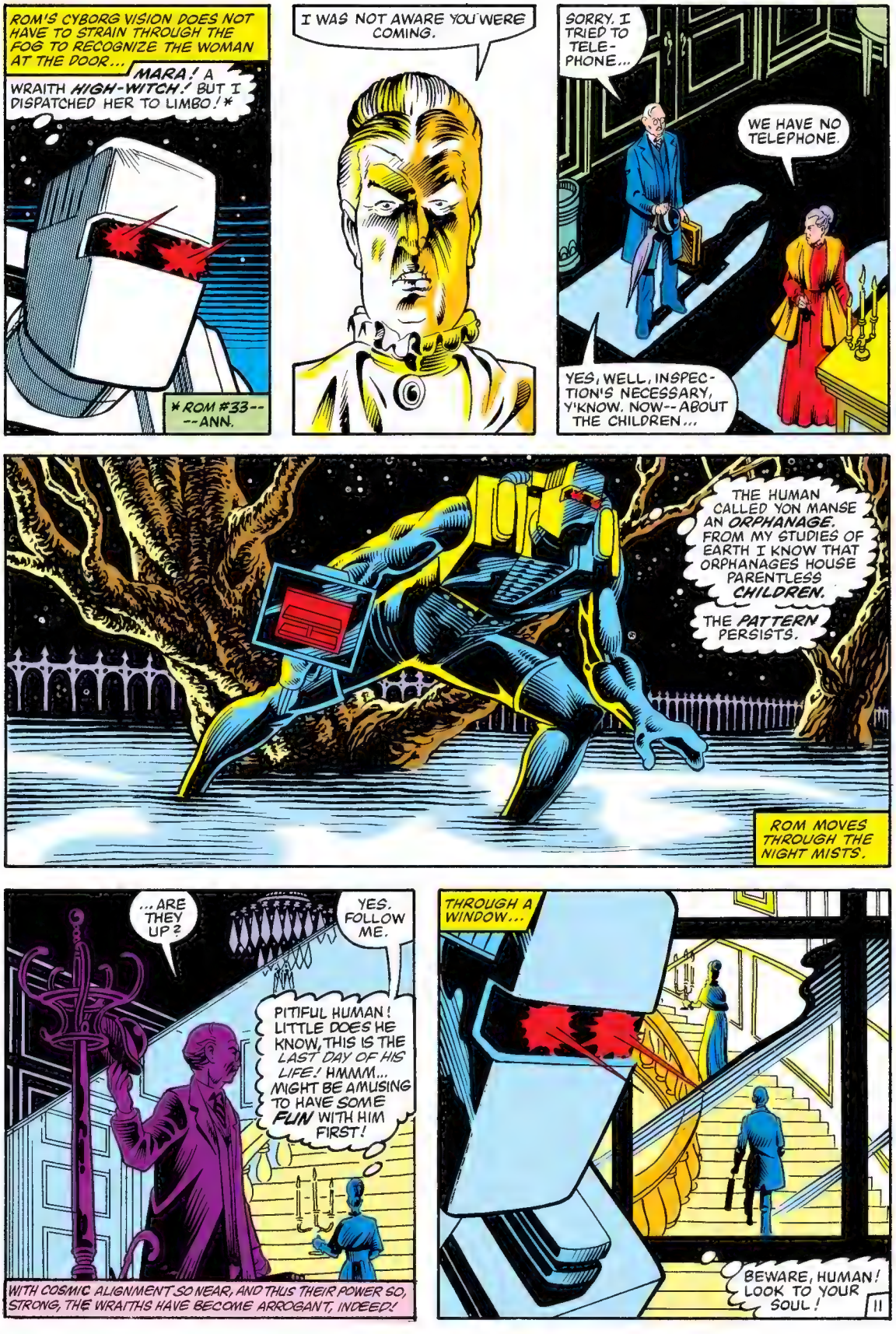

ACCURSED HUMAN, YOU--!
"THE FLAMES CUT SHORT WHATEVER EPITHET THE DEMON WAS ABOUT TO HURL.
"THE DEMON ITSELF COLLAPSES IN A CASCADE OF DUST.
"THE CHILD GOES BACK TO SLEEP.
BE NOT TOO QUICK TO GLOAT, MAN OF EARTH.
THE NIGHT IS LONG--
--AND THE NIGHT IS OURS!
"I HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT CREATURES WHO CAN, WITH BUT A WORD, BECOME AS BLACK AS NIGHT THEMSELVES.
"STILL, I SENSE THERE IS NO MAGIC IN THIS TRANSFORMATION.
"AND WHILE I DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT--
"-- I NEED NOT UNDERSTAND... TO OVERCOME!
7

SKAW
SKAW
"THE STENCH OF BURNING FEATHERS FILLS THE AIR.
"THE FEATHERS TURN TO DUST.
"TWO SPIRITS SURVIVED THIS NIGHT OF EVIL.
SLEEP LONG, LITTLE ONE.
"QUESTIONS...
"THE DEMONS CALLED THEMSELVES DIRE WRAITHS. THEY WERE NOT OF EARTH, YET THEY SOUGHT TO RAISE A CHILD OF EARTH FROM THE DEAD.
"WHY?
"I DREAD TO LEARN THE ANSWER, YET KNOW I SHALL."
8


FROM THE WESTERN COAST OF WALES, ACROSS THE BRISTOL CHANNEL, TO ENGLAND ITSELF AND A TINY HAMLET CALLED SHEPTON MALLET NEAR GLOUCESTER, ROM SPACEKNIGHT HAS COME.
HIS ENERGY ANALYZER GLOWS SOFTLY, ITS CRIMSON BEAM PERCEIVABLE ONLY TO ROM'S CYBORG EYES!
IT HAS LED HIM FROM ONE CONTINENT TO ANOTHER, IN SEARCH OF HIS ENEMIES, THE DEMONIC DIRE WRAITHS.
NOW, HE HAS FOUND THEM AGAIN...
9


AND IN HIM A FEAR GROWS, FOR A PATTERN HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED. WHEREVER THE WRAITHS HAVE STRUCK OF LATE, THEIR TARGET HAS EVER BEEN THE SAME...
EARTH'S CHILDREN!
THERE IS WRAITH WITCHERY AT WORK. FIRST THEY SOUGHT TO MYSTICALLY TRANSFORM THE CHILD SYBIL--
--AND THEN THE INNOCENT BABES OF GWILLYN DALE.
YON MANSION REEKS OF THEIR SINISTER SORCERY! I MUST SEEK ITS SOURCE!


HOWEVER, BEFORE ROM CAN MOVE IN, A CAR PRESSES THROUGH THE FOG TO THE MANSION'S PORCH.
A RATHER DAPPER GENTLEMAN STRIDES UP THE STAIRS, AND TAPS OUT A HELLO WITH THE HANDLE OF HIS UMBRELLA.
HE WAITS IMPATIENTLY, COUNTING THE SECONDS AS IF THEY WERE DOLLARS. AT LAST, THE DOOR OPENS.
YES?
CARRUTHERS, ORPHANAGE INSPECTOR. UNGODLY HOUR, BUT COULDN'T BE HELPED.
10


ROM'S CYBORG VISION DOES NOT HAVE TO STRAIN THROUGH THE FOG TO RECOGNIZE THE WOMAN AT THE DOOR...
MARA! A WRAITH HIGH-WITCH! BUT I DISPATCHED HER TO LIMBO! *
* ROM #33--ANN.
I WAS NOT AWARE YOU WERE COMING.
SORRY. I TRIED TO TELE-PHONE...
WE HAVE NO TELEPHONE.
YES, WELL, INSPEC-TION'S NECESSARY, Y'KNOW. NOW--ABOUT THE CHILDREN...
THE HUMAN CALLED YON MANSE AN ORPHANAGE. FROM MY STUDIES OF EARTH I KNOW THAT ORPHANAGES HOUSE PARENTLESS CHILDREN.
THE PATTERN PERSISTS.
ROM MOVES THROUGH THE NIGHT MISTS.
...ARE THEY UP?
YES. FOLLOW ME.
PITIFUL HUMAN! LITTLE DOES HE KNOW, THIS IS THE LAST DAY OF HIS LIFE! HMMM... MIGHT BE AMUSING TO HAVE SOME FUN WITH HIM FIRST!
WITH COSMIC ALIGNMENT SO NEAR, AND THUS THEIR POWER SO, STRONG, THE WRAITHS HAVE BECOME ARROGANT, INDEED!
THROUGH A WINDOW...
BEWARE, HUMAN! LOOK TO YOUR SOUL!
11

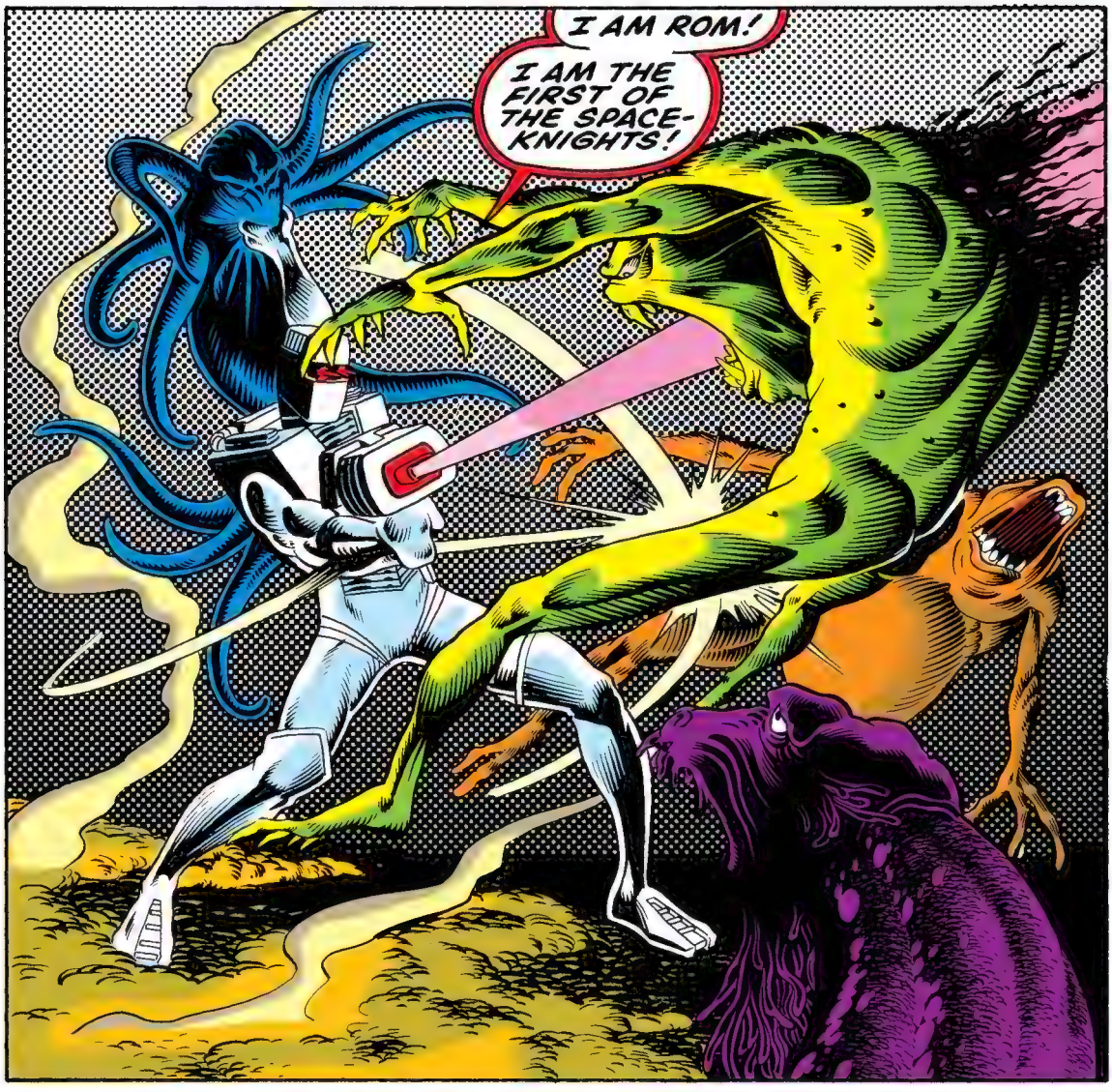
RATHER FRIGHTFUL OLD PLACE.
IT SUITS MY NEEDS.
MINE...
...AND THE CHILDREN'S!
GOOD LORD! WHY ARE THEY ALL SITTING ON THE EDGE OF THEIR BEDS LIKE THAT?
WHY DON'T YOU ASK THEM?
I SHALL. SEE HERE, CHILD, DON'T YOU THINK YOU'LL CATCH...
...COLD? THIS CHILD'S FLESH IS AS COLD AS ICE!
I DEMAND AN EXPLANATION AT ONCE!
OH, YOU DO, DO YOU?
12

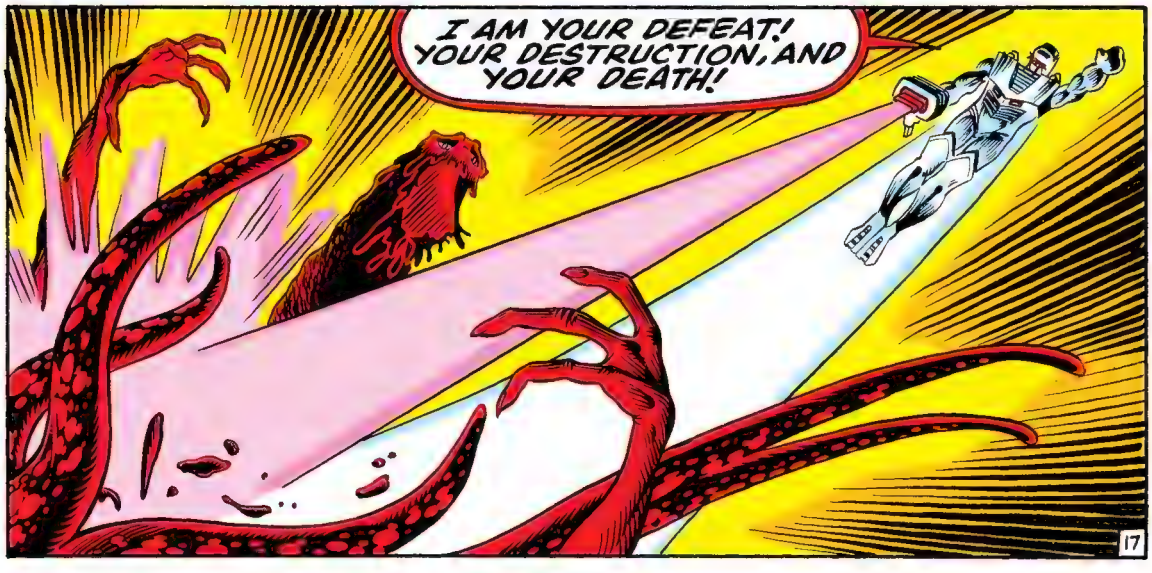
YES, I BLOODY WELL DO! THE STATE CAREFULLY MONITORS THE ORPHANAGES IT LICENSES!
IF YOU'VE UNDERFED THESE CHILDREN, OR SUPPLIED INADEQUATE HEAT, OR--AS I SUSPECT--DRUGGED THEM, I SHALL SEE THAT CHARGES ARE BROUGHT AGAINST YOU!
YOU DARE THREATEN ME, YOU PALE, PATHETIC HUMAN WORM?
YOU SAY THE WORD HUMAN AS IF YOU WERE NOT!
YOU ARE PERCEPTIVE, HUMAN! IT IS A QUALITY THAT SHALL DIE WITH YOU!
CHILDREN, RISE UP AND GREET MR. CARRUTHERS!
THE CHIL-DREN?
THE CHILDREN!
THINK OF THE EMBARASSMENT WE SAVE YOU BY SLAYING YOU, HUMAN--FOR HOW COULD YOU EVER HAVE REPORTED THIS?!!
GLLKKK!
A MAN OF FEW WORDS, CARRUTHERS NOW HAS EVEN LESS TO SAY.
AT THAT MO-MENT, A CLEAR CRIMSON GLOW ILLUMINATES THE ATTIC CHAMBER.
EH? IT'S TOO EARLY FOR SUNRISE--!
13

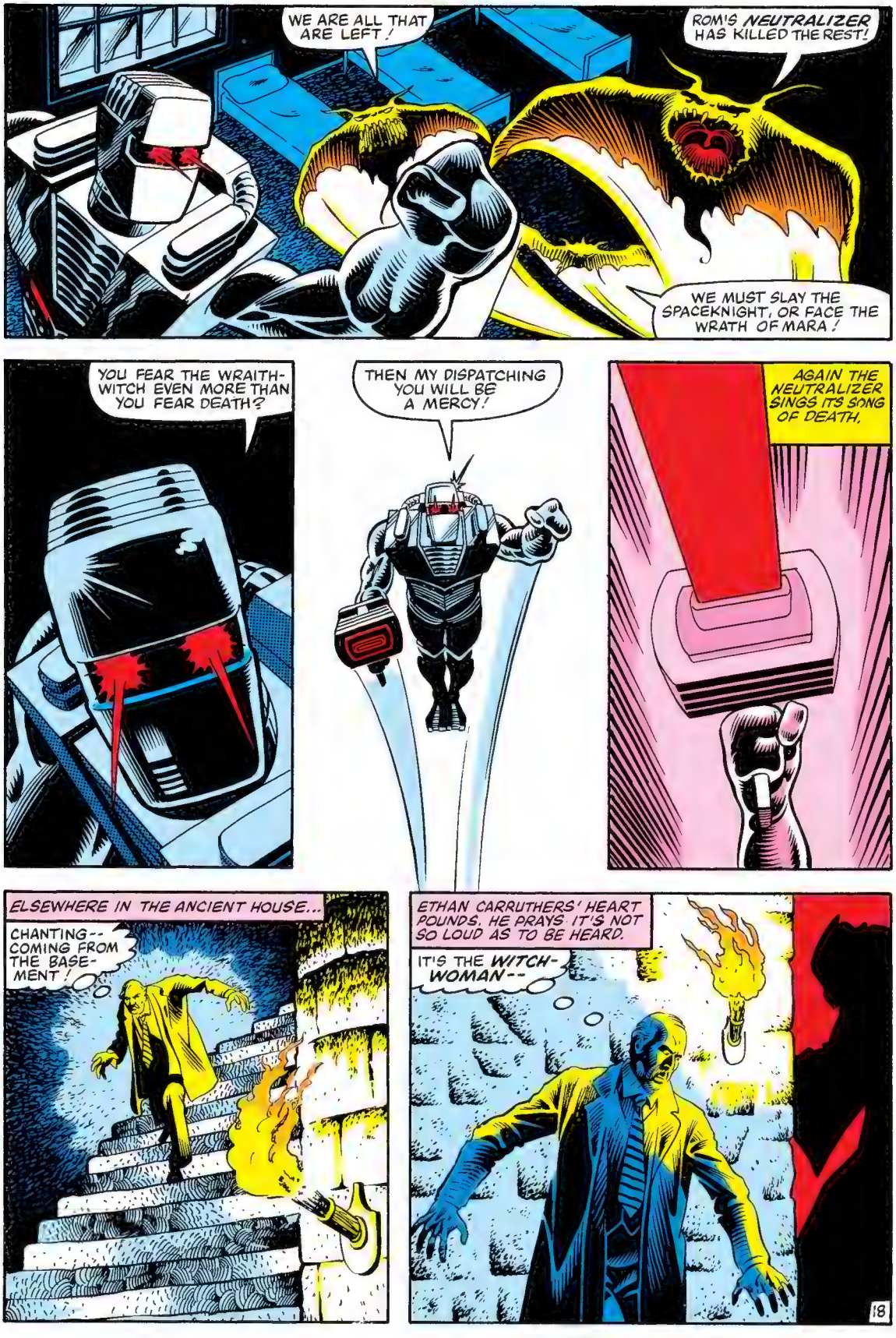
SKRASH
GREETINGS, MARA!
ROM!
R-ROM?
I MADE THE GLOW OF MY ENERGY ANALYZER VISIBLE. I WANTED YOU TO KNOW I WAS COMING.
I WANTED YOU TO KNOW THE TERROR IN THE MOMENT BEFORE I BANISH YOU ALL TO LIMITLESS LIMBO!
THE ANALYZER SCANS THE OCCUPANTS OF THE ROOM. ONLY CARRUTHERS IS REVEALED AS HUMAN. ALL THE REST ARE WHAT THEY APPEAR TO BE... DIRE WRAITHS!
AND YOU, MARA, I SHALL BANISH A SECOND TIME!
SPACEKNIGHT FOOL! I KNOW WHAT YOU DID TO MY SISTER-WITCH! BUT THERE ARE MANY MARAS!
WE ARE A CLASS OF WRAITH-KIND UNTO OURSELVES--
--AND, AS EARTH AND WRAITHWORLD MOVE INEXORABLY INTO COSMIC ALIGNMENT, OUR POWER--
--THE POWER OF DARK MAGIC, OF BLACK MYSTICISM, OF SINISTER SORCERY, BECOMES INCREASINGLY ASCENDANT!
14

BANISH ME, SPACE-KNIGHT? YOU WISH YOU COULD!
AGAIN I HEAR OF THE COMING COSMIC ALIGNMENT, WHEN DIRE WRAITH MAGIC WILL BE AT ITS PEAK!
WHAT HORROR DOES IT BODE FOR EARTH? WHAT IS ITS CONNECTION WITH EARTH'S CHILDREN?
I AM STRONGER THAN MY BANISHED SISTER, ROM! MY MAGIC IS MIGHTY INDEED!
WITNESS WHAT IT DOES TO THESE CHILDREN OF DARKNESS!
NO, MARA! PLEASE DON'T SEND US AGAINST ROM!
WE HAVEN'T YOUR SORCERY TO COMMAND!
COWARDS! CHANGELING CURS! YOU ARE BRAVE WHEN ACCOSTING HELPLESS CHILDREN--
--BUT CRAVEN CARRION WHEN IT COMES TO FACING THE SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT!
IN THE MIDST OF MAYHEM, THE DAZED CARRUTHERS CRAWLS FREE.
WHO--WHAT ARE THESE HORRORS?
15

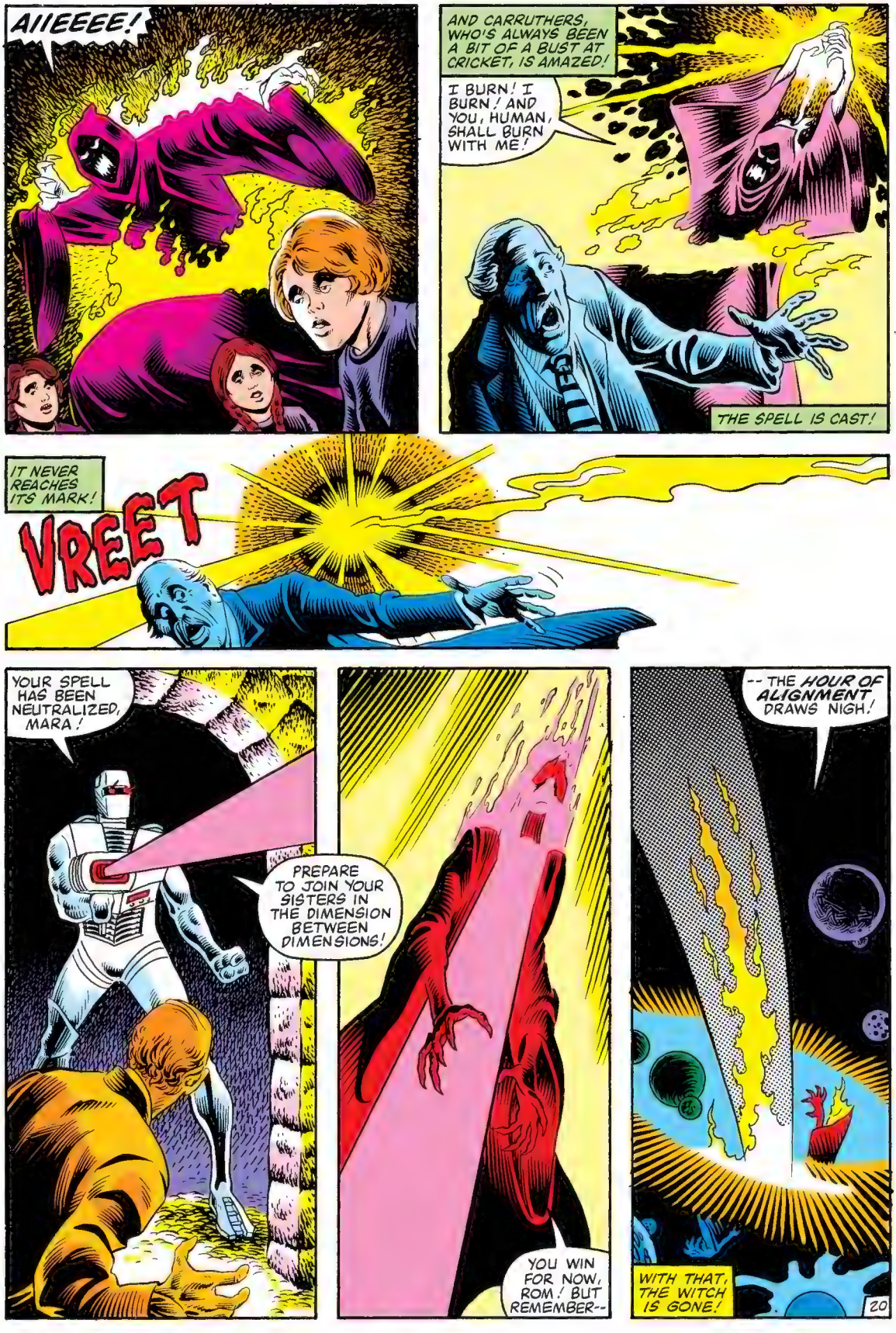
AND WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN THEY'VE REPLACED ??!
MAN OF EARTH--HEAR ME! MARA NEEDS THE CHILDREN TO WORK HER MAGIC!
IF YOU CARE FOR THEIR WELFARE, FIND THEM!
I-I WILL!
ETHAN CARRUTHERS HAS SURVIVED THE LITTLE RIPPLES IN LIFE BY METHODICALLY EXERCISING MODERATION.
TONIGHT, HE THROWS CAUTION TO THE WINDS.
THE HUMAN WILL MEET THE SAME FATE WE HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU, SPACEKNIGHT!
I GROW TIRED OF THREATS FROM YOU AND YOUR KIND, WRAITH-SCUM!
VREET
16


I AM ROM!
I AM THE FIRST OF THE SPACE-KNIGHTS!


I AM YOUR DEFEAT! YOUR DESTRUCTION, AND YOUR DEATH!
17


WE ARE ALL THAT ARE LEFT!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER HAS KILLED THE REST!
WE MUST SLAY THE SPACEKNIGHT, OR FACE THE WRATH OF MARA!
YOU FEAR THE WRAITH-WITCH EVEN MORE THAN YOU FEAR DEATH?
THEN MY DISPATCHING YOU WILL BE A MERCY!
AGAIN THE NEUTRALIZER SINGS ITS SONG OF DEATH.
ELSEWHERE IN THE ANCIENT HOUSE...
CHANTING-- COMING FROM THE BASE-MENT!
ETHAN CARRUTHERS' HEART POUNDS. HE PRAYS IT'S NOT SO LOUD AS TO BE HEARD.
IT'S THE WITCH-WOMAN--
18

--AND THE CHIL-DREN!
OF EARTH YOU ARE, ON EARTH YOU THRIVED, OF EARTHLINESS MUST YOU BE DEPRIVED!
THE CHILDREN SEEM NOT TO NOTICE, NOT TO CARE.
IT IS OBVIOUS THEY ARE ENTRANCED AS MARA WORKS HER MAGIC UPON THEM.
BY ALL THAT'S HOLY--
--LEAVE THE CHILDREN BE!!!
THE EARTHLING, HURLING FIRE-- ?!!
THE TORCH FLIES STRAIGHT AND TRUE.
19


AIIEEEE!
AND CARRUTHERS, WHO'S ALWAYS BEEN A BIT OF A BUST AT CRICKET, IS AMAZED!
I BURN! I BURN! AND YOU, HUMAN, SHALL BURN WITH ME!
THE SPELL IS CAST!
IT NEVER REACHES ITS MARK!
VREET
YOUR SPELL HAS BEEN NEUTRALIZED, MARA!
PREPARE TO JOIN YOUR SISTERS IN THE DIMENSION BETWEEN DIMENSIONS!
YOU WIN FOR NOW, ROM! BUT REMEMBER--
-- THE HOUR OF ALIGNMENT DRAWS NIGH!
WITH THAT, THE WITCH IS GONE!
20

THE CHILDREN...?
THEY APPEAR TO BE ALL RIGHT NOW!
GOOD HEAVENS, HOW SHALL I EVER REPORT ALL THIS?!?
HE WILL NOT. NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE IT.
STORMHAVEN CASTLE, SCOTLAND...
YOU'VE BEEN AWFULLY SILENT SINCE YOU CAME IN, LAD. ANYTHING WRONG?
"I DO NOT ANSWER.
"HOW CAN I TELL NAYLAND SMITH, BLACKJACK TARR, CLIVE RESTON... OR EVEN LEIKO... WHAT TRANSPIRED EARLIER IN THE CHURCHYARD--
"--ESPECIALLY WHEN I HAVE YET TO RECKON IT WITH REALITY MYSELF?
SMITH, YOU'VE BEEN GOGGLING OVER THAT PAPER ALL NIGHT! WHAT'S SO BLOODY IMPORTANT ABOUT AN EGYPTIAN MUMMY?
IT'S THE LEGEND SURROUNDING THIS ONE THAT FASCINATES ME, RESTON! SHE WAS A CHILD PRINCESS -- BURIED ALIVE -- AND THE STORY IS THAT SHE'S DUE TO RISE FROM THE DEAD!
SMITH, GIVE ME THE PAPER!
"I READ. THE NEWSPRINT IS BLACK, BUT IT TAKES ON THE RED OF BLOOD. I FEAR FOR THE FUTURE, YET I DO NOT KNOW WHY.
LONDON TIMES
MUMMY OF EGYPTIAN CHILD PRINCESS BROUGHT TO BRITISH MUSEUM
WE MUST GO TO LONDON AT ONCE...
21

CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, AN OCEAN AWAY.
IN A PHARMACEUTICAL LABORATORY CLOSED FOR THE WEEKEND, A YOUNG WOMAN LOOKS AT A SUIT OF EMPTY ARMOR.
WHAT AM I DOING? WHAT HAVE I DONE?
I MUST BE OUT OF MY MIND!
I WENT TO THE CEMETARY, AND SAW--OR DREAMT I SAW--THE GHOST OF THE DEAD SPACEKNIGHT STARSHINE! SHE...GAVE ME HER POWER AND I--I ROBBED HER GRAVE--AND BROUGHT HER ARMOR BACK HERE!
WHY? WHAT DO I HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?
YOU WISH TO BECOME A SPACEKNIGHT, BRANDY CLARK. AS SUCH, YOU WISH TO OFFER YOUR LOVE TO ROM.
FOR THAT YOU WILL NEED THE AID AND ASSISTANCE OF... DOCTOR DREDD!
22
NEXT: SHANG CHI AND ROM JOIN ARMS IN:
CHILDHOOD'S END!

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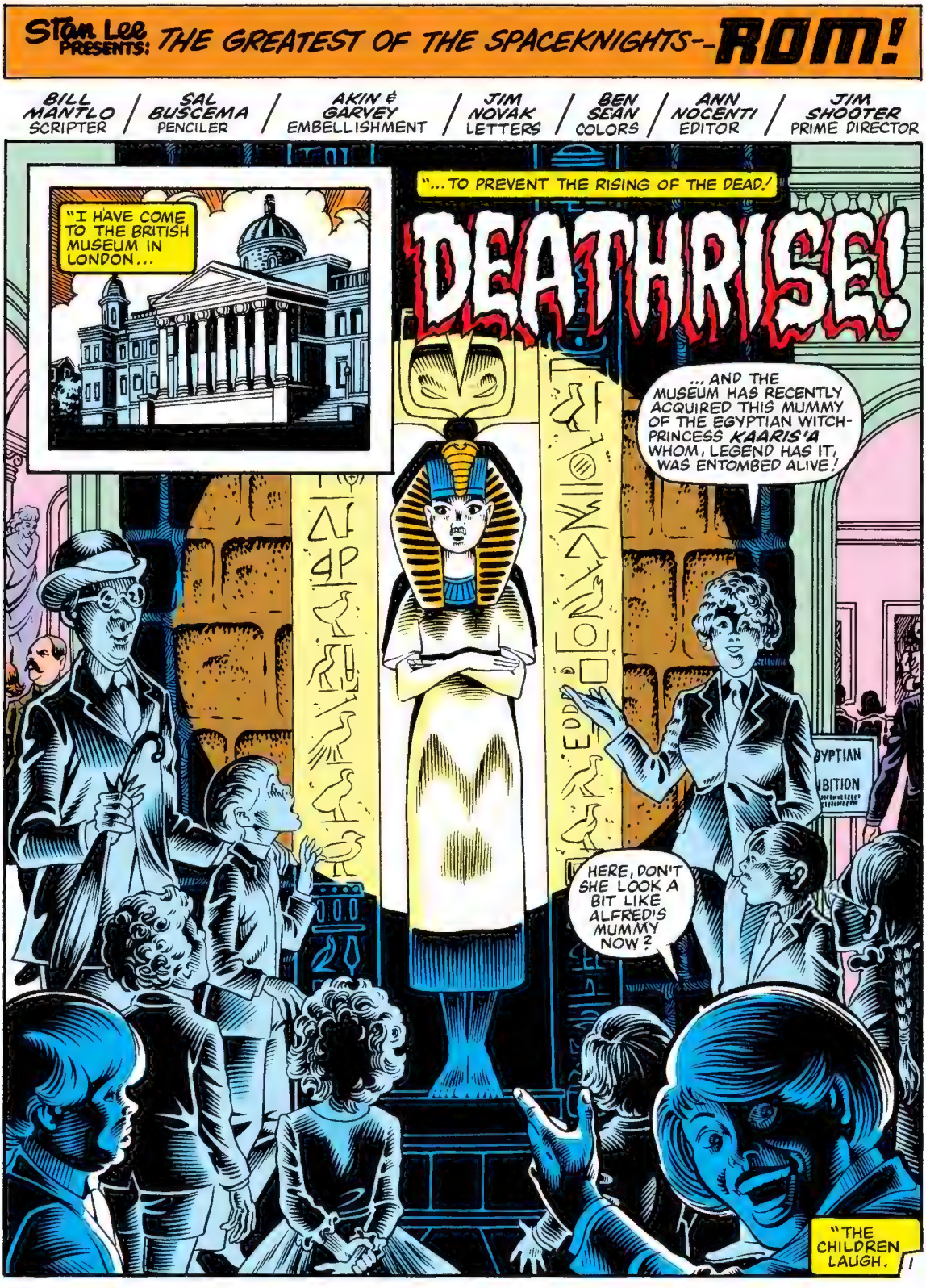
ROM
™
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
GENE DAY

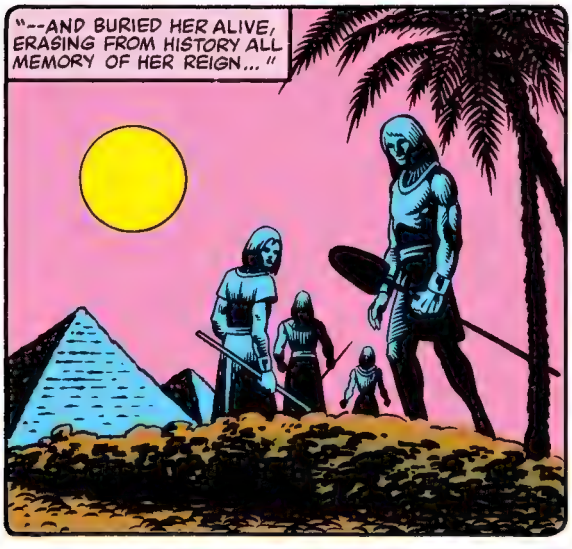

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPTER
SAL BUSCEMA PENCILER
AKIN & GARVEY EMBELLISHMENT
JIM NOVAK LETTERS
BEN SEAN COLORS
ANN NOCENTI EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
"I HAVE COME TO THE BRITISH MUSEUM IN LONDON...
"...TO PREVENT THE RISING OF THE DEAD.'
DEATHRISE!
...AND THE MUSEUM HAS RECENTLY ACQUIRED THIS MUMMY OF THE EGYPTIAN WITCH-PRINCESS KAARIS'A WHOM, LEGEND HAS IT, WAS ENTOMBED ALIVE!
HERE, DON'T SHE LOOK A BIT LIKE ALFRED'S MUMMY NOW?
"THE CHILDREN LAUGH.

"I PRAY THEY WILL STILL BE CAPABLE OF LAUGHTER ERE THIS DAY IS DONE.
IS THAT IT, SHANG?
IS THAT THE BODY YOU DRAGGED US ALL THE BLOODY WAY FROM SCOTLAND TO SEE?
YOU'VE GONE FARTHER FOR A WOMAN BEFORE, RESTON!
SHE APPEARS BUT A CHILD.
SHE WAS A CHILD WHEN SHE DIED, LEIKO.
"CLIVE RESTON, BLACKJACK TARR, LEIKO WU, AND I, SHANG CHI, LISTEN AS SIR DENIS NAYLAND SMITH TELLS THE TALE...
MOST EGYPTIAN ROYALTY HAD THEMSELVES BURIED IN ORNATE TOMBS.
KAARIS'A WAS FOUND IN AN UNMARKED SARCOPHAGUS HIDDEN BENEATH THE DESERT SANDS.
A PAPYRUS SCROLL PRESERVED IN A SEALED FUNERARY URN TOLD THE TALE...
"...OF A PHAROAH'S SURPRISE WHEN, IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, A STAR SEEMED TO FALL FROM THE SKY.
"THE PHAROAH RACED TO THE SIGHT, AND INSTEAD OF A STAR FOUND A GLOWING CHARIOT OF FIRE.
"FROM THE CHARIOT EMERGED A TINY, LOATHSOME CREATURE THE LIKE OF WHICH THE PHAROAH HAD NEVER SEEN.
2

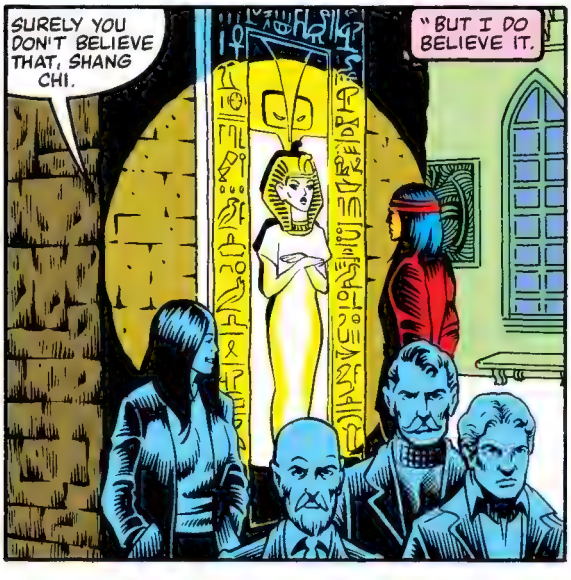
"THE PHAROAH WAS APPALLED, BUT EVEN AS HE STARED IN HORROR--
"--THE CREATURE BEGAN TO CHANGE ITS SHAPE--
"--TAKING ON THE GUISE OF ONE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN DIETY--
"--AFTER ANOTHER, UNTIL FINALLY RESOLVING ITSELF INTO--
"--THE SHAPE OF A YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN WHO IMMEDIATELY WON OVER THE PHAROAH'S HEART.
THIS CHILD WAS SENT BY THE GODS TO BE THE DAUGHTER I NEVER HAD!
"KAARIS'A SHE WAS NAMED, AND WAS BROUGHT INTO THE ROYAL COURT WHERE THE PHAROAH ORDERED HIS PRIESTS TO SEE TO HER EDUCATION.
"THE PRIESTS SOON CAME TO RESENT AND FEAR HER--
"--PERHAPS BECAUSE HER MASTERY OF DARK AND ARCANE ARTS SOON EXCEEDED THEIRS.
"WITHIN A YEAR, THE PHAROAH WAS DEAD, SLAIN BY ONE OF KAARIS'A'S PLAYMATES. SOON A CHANGE CAME OVER ALL THE CHILDREN OF MEMPHIS--
"--AND OVER ALL EGYPT, AS WELL, AS MISERY SETTLED LIKE A SHROUD UPON THE LAND.
3

"THE PEOPLE FEARED KAARIS'A, BUT THEY FEARED WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO THEMSELVES EVEN MORE.
WITCH! WE HAVE COME TO RECLAIM OUR CHILDREN!
"SHE STRUGGLED, CHANGING INTO SHAPE AFTER SHAPE.

"BUT HER ENEMIES WERE TOO MANY, AND AT LAST THEY BOUND HER--

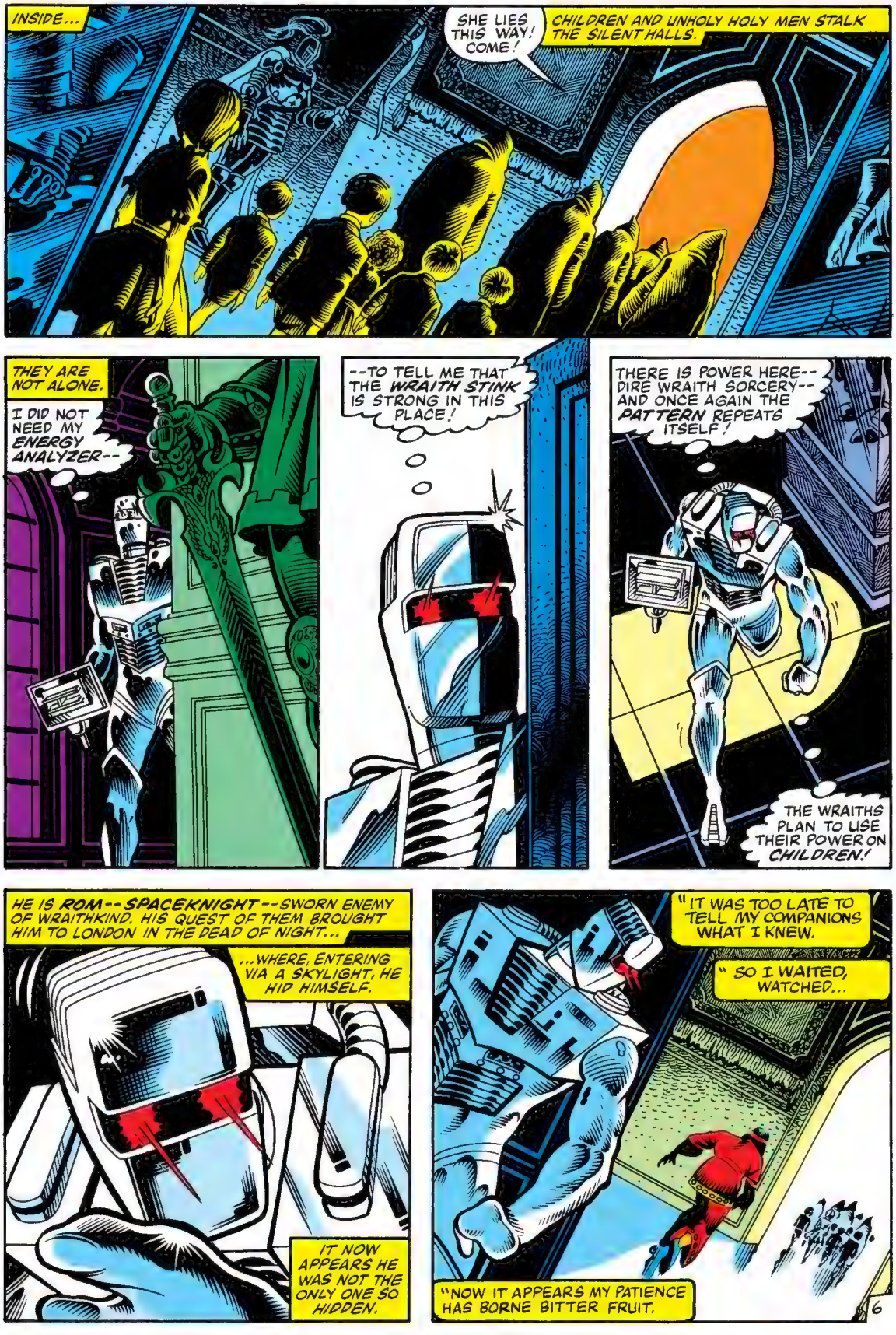

"--AND BURIED HER ALIVE, ERASING FROM HISTORY ALL MEMORY OF HER REIGN..."

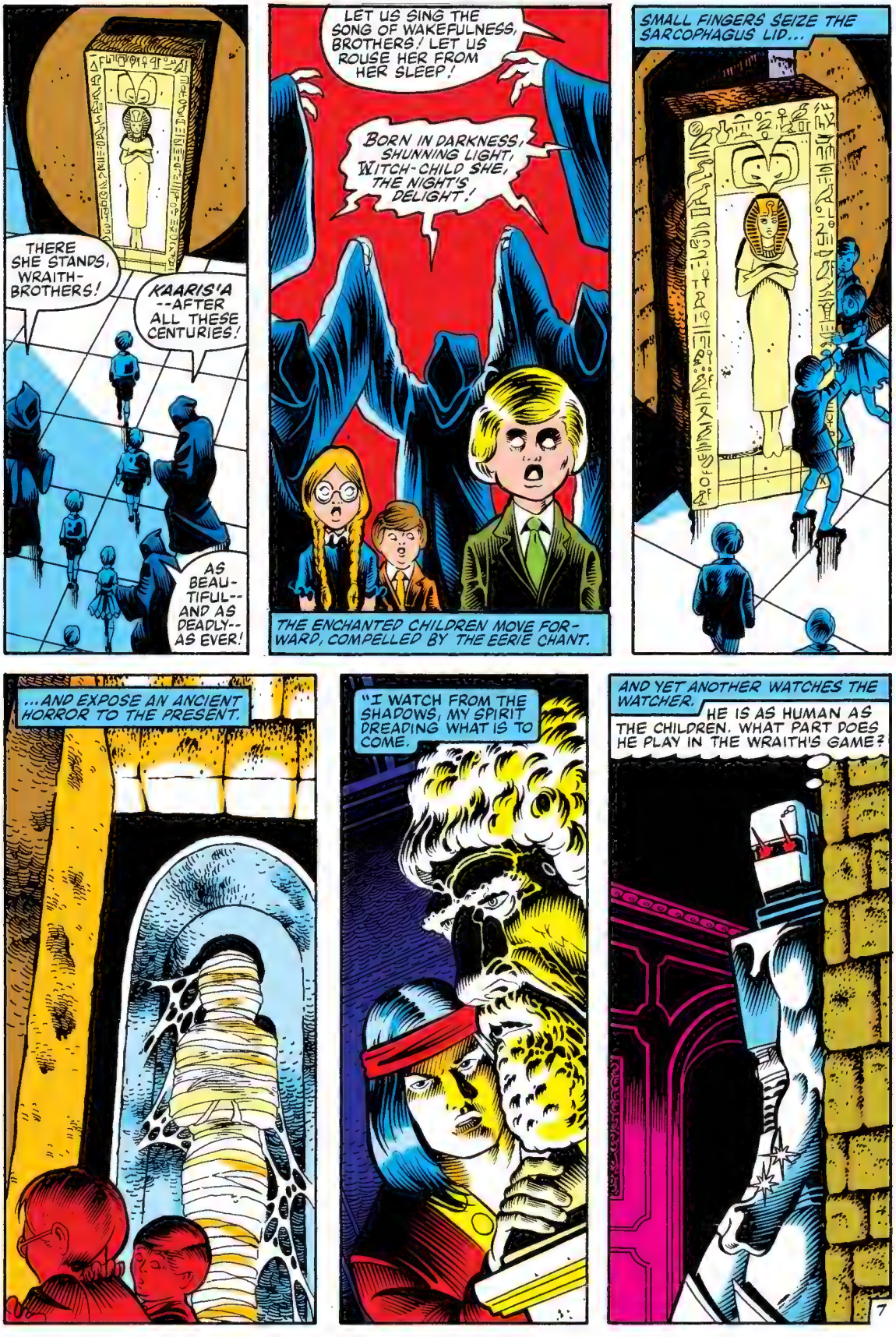
...UNTIL NOW.
THE LEGENDS SAY SHE WILL RISE AGAIN.

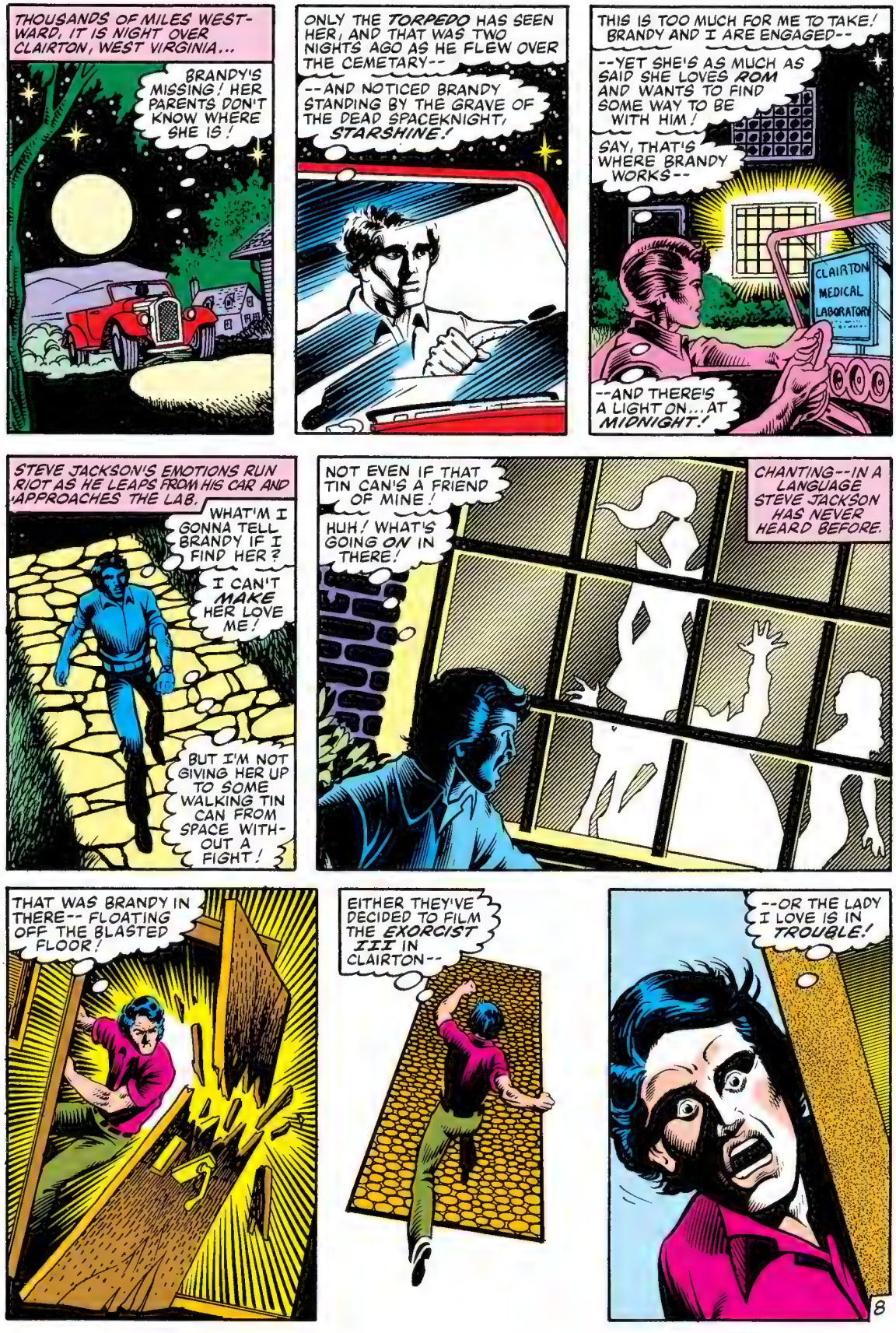

SURELY YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT, SHANG CHI.
"BUT I DO BELIEVE IT.

"JUST TWO NIGHTS AGO, IN AN OLD CHURCHYARD, I BATTLED WITH SHAPE-CHANGING DEMONS WHO SOUGHT TO RAISE A CHILD FROM THE DEAD.
"I DEFEATED THEIR MAGIC, AND SAVED THE CHILD'S SPIRIT, AND MY OWN.
"I DO FEAR THAT MORE THAN MERE COINCIDENCE EXISTS BETWEEN THAT NIGHT AND THIS MUMMY.
4

SORRY, FATHERS. THE MUSEUM'S ABOUT TO CLOSE.
SHANG CHI?
HE'S WANDERED OFF, LEIKO -- LIKE HE ALWAYS DOES.
MAYBE HE'S IN LOVE WITH THE MUMMY.
WE'LL WAIT FOR HIM OUTSIDE.
I TOLD YOU, FATHERS, THE MUSEUM'S...
EH?
YES. I UNDERSTAND.
I HAVE SEEN NOTHING.
COME, WRAITH-BROTHERS--
--AND BID THE CHILDREN WE HAVE ENCHANTED TO FOLLOW.
THE MUSEUM CLOSES TO THE PUBLIC.
OUTSIDE...
WELL, WHERE THE BLAZES IS THE BLOODY CHINAMAN?
SHANG CHI DIDN'T COME OUT AHEAD OF US? LEIKO...?
I DO NOT KNOW, SIR DENIS.
I TOLD YOU -- HE'S GOT A THING FOR THAT BLASTED MUMMY!
5


INSIDE...
SHE LIES THIS WAY! COME!
CHILDREN AND UNHOLY HOLY MEN STALK THE SILENT HALLS.
THEY ARE NOT ALONE.
I DID NOT NEED MY ENERGY ANALYZER--
--TO TELL ME THAT THE WRAITH STINK IS STRONG IN THIS PLACE!
THERE IS POWER HERE-- DIRE WRAITH SORCERY-- AND ONCE AGAIN THE PATTERN REPEATS ITSELF!
THE WRAITHS PLAN TO USE THEIR POWER ON CHILDREN!
HE IS ROM--SPACEKNIGHT--SWORN ENEMY OF WRAITHKIND. HIS QUEST OF THEM BROUGHT HIM TO LONDON IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT...
...WHERE, ENTERING VIA A SKYLIGHT, HE HID HIMSELF.
IT NOW APPEARS HE WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE SO HIDDEN.
"IT WAS TOO LATE TO TELL MY COMPANIONS WHAT I KNEW.
" SO I WAITED, WATCHED...
"NOW IT APPEARS MY PATIENCE HAS BORNE BITTER FRUIT.
6

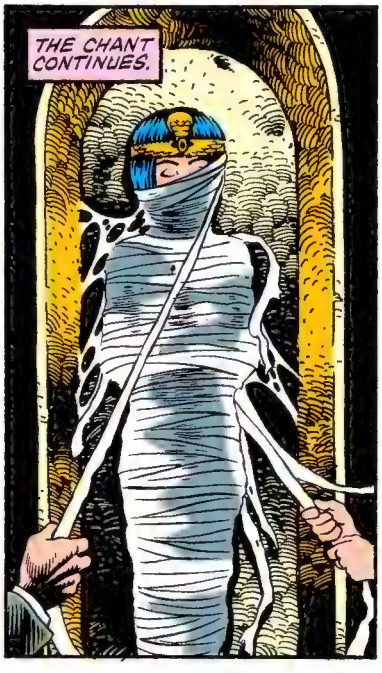

THERE SHE STANDS, WRAITH-BROTHERS!
KAARIS'A --AFTER ALL THESE CENTURIES!
AS BEAU-TIFUL-- AND AS DEADLY-- AS EVER!
LET US SING THE SONG OF WAKEFULNESS, BROTHERS! LET US ROUSE HER FROM HER SLEEP!
BORN IN DARKNESS, SHUNNING LIGHT, WITCH-CHILD SHE, THE NIGHT'S DELIGHT!
THE ENCHANTED CHILDREN MOVE FOR-WARD, COMPELLED BY THE EERIE CHANT.
SMALL FINGERS SEIZE THE SARCOPHAGUS LID...
...AND EXPOSE AN ANCIENT HORROR TO THE PRESENT.
"I WATCH FROM THE SHADOWS, MY SPIRIT DREADING WHAT IS TO COME.
AND YET ANOTHER WATCHES THE WATCHER.
HE IS AS HUMAN AS THE CHILDREN. WHAT PART DOES HE PLAY IN THE WRAITH'S GAME?
7


THOUSANDS OF MILES WESTWARD, IT IS NIGHT OVER CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA...
BRANDY'S MISSING! HER PARENTS DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE IS!
ONLY THE TORPEDO HAS SEEN HER, AND THAT WAS TWO NIGHTS AGO AS HE FLEW OVER THE CEMETARY--
--AND NOTICED BRANDY STANDING BY THE GRAVE OF THE DEAD SPACEKNIGHT, STARSHINE!
THIS IS TOO MUCH FOR ME TO TAKE! BRANDY AND I ARE ENGAGED--
--YET SHE'S AS MUCH AS SAID SHE LOVES ROM AND WANTS TO FIND SOME WAY TO BE WITH HIM!
SAY, THAT'S WHERE BRANDY WORKS--
CLAIRTON MEDICAL LABORATORY
--AND THERE'S A LIGHT ON... AT MIDNIGHT!
STEVE JACKSON'S EMOTIONS RUN RIOT AS HE LEAPS FROM HIS CAR AND APPROACHES THE LAB.
WHAT'M I GONNA TELL BRANDY IF I FIND HER?
I CAN'T MAKE HER LOVE ME!
BUT I'M NOT GIVING HER UP TO SOME WALKING TIN CAN FROM SPACE WITHOUT A FIGHT!
NOT EVEN IF THAT TIN CAN'S A FRIEND OF MINE!
HUH! WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE!
CHANTING--IN A LANGUAGE STEVE JACKSON HAS NEVER HEARD BEFORE.
THAT WAS BRANDY IN THERE-- FLOATING OFF THE BLASTED FLOOR!
EITHER THEY'VE DECIDED TO FILM THE EXORCIST III IN CLAIRTON--
--OR THE LADY I LOVE IS IN TROUBLE!
8

BRANDY!
SURROUNDED BY A GLOWING NIMBUS OF POWER, BRANDY CLARK HOVERS IN MIDAIR.
BEFORE HER HANGS SUSPENDED THE EMPTY ARMOR OF THE DEAD SPACE-KNIGHT, STARSHINE.
THE WORDS OF THE SPELL THAT HOLDS THEM BOTH THERE ARE UNTRANSCRIBABLE.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO BRANDY?!!
WHY, I AM DOCTOR DREDD--
--AND I AM MERELY GRANTING YOUR GIRLFRIEND'S FONDEST WISH!

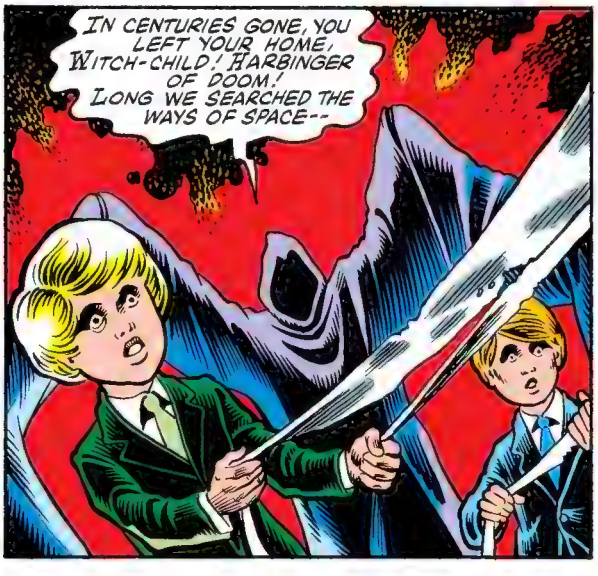
OUTSIDE THE BRITISH MUSEUM...
I HAVE SEEN NO ONE. THE MUSEUM IS EMPTY. THE MUSEUM IS CLOSED.
YOU'RE BEGINNIN' TA SOUND LIKE A BLOODY AUTOMATON, BUDDY!
NOW I'LL TELL YA AGAIN! THE CHINAMAN DIDN'T COME OUT WITH US, SO HE MUST STILL BE INSIDE!
I HAVE SEEN NO ONE. THE MUSEUM IS EMPTY...
THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG HERE, TARR.
INDEED THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE, LEIKO. THIS SECURITY GUARD SEEMS AS IF IN A WAKING SLEEP...
...FROM WHICH WE MUST AWAKEN HIM IF WE ARE TO LEARN THE WHEREABOUTS OF SHANG-CHI.
FLIK
EH?
WHAT AM I DOING OUT HERE? I'M SUPPOSED TO BE INSIDE!
SMITH! THE FLAME FROM YOUR LIGHTER SNAPPED HIM OUT OF IT!
THEN IT WAS A HYPNOTIC TRANCE!
RIGHT! AND I'LL WAGER WHOEVER INDUCED IT IS STILL INSIDE--
--WITH SHANG CHI!
10

DAUGHTER BORN OF DARK SURPRISE--
--WE SONS OF WRAITH-WORLD BID YE RISE!

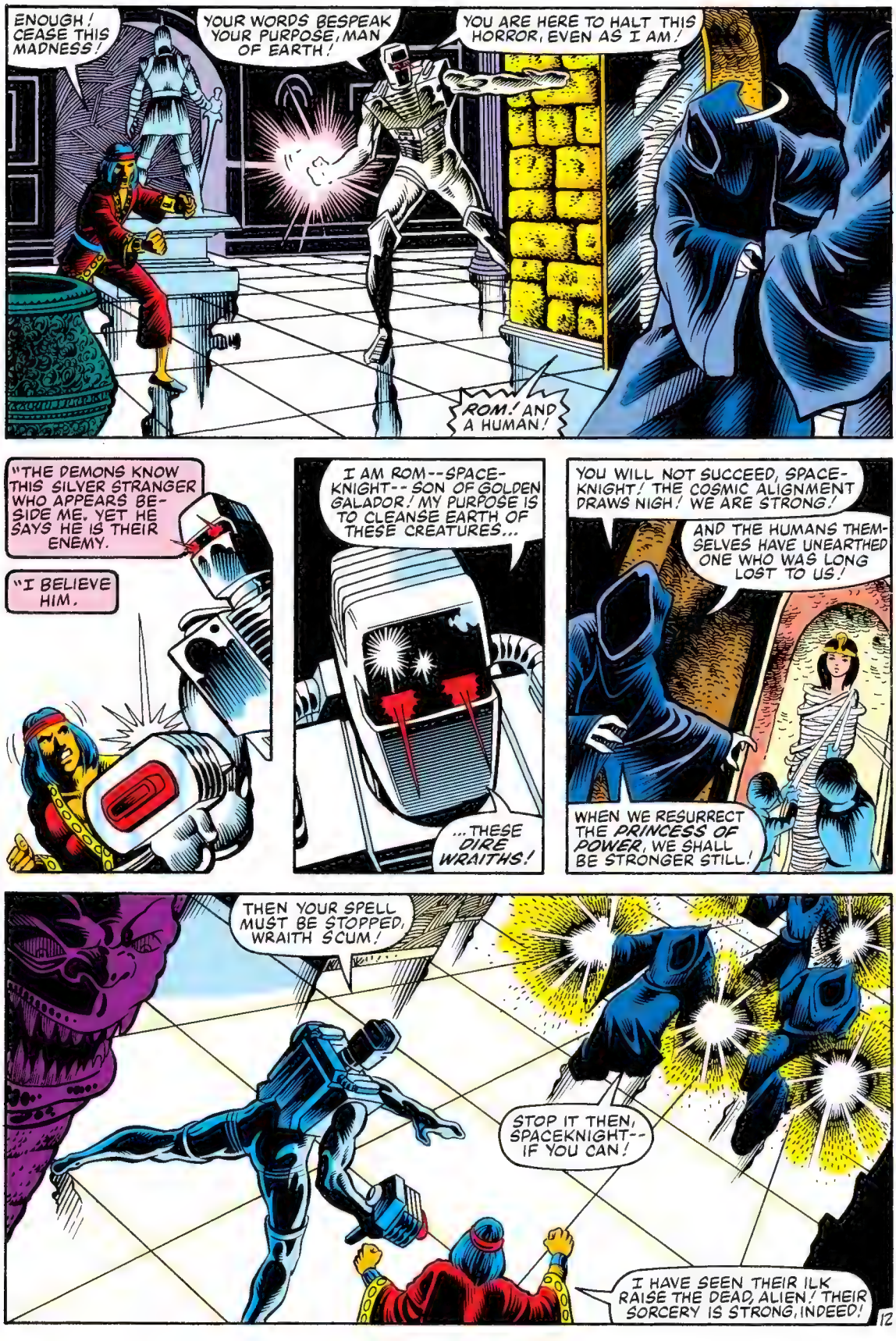

THE CHANT CONTINUES.

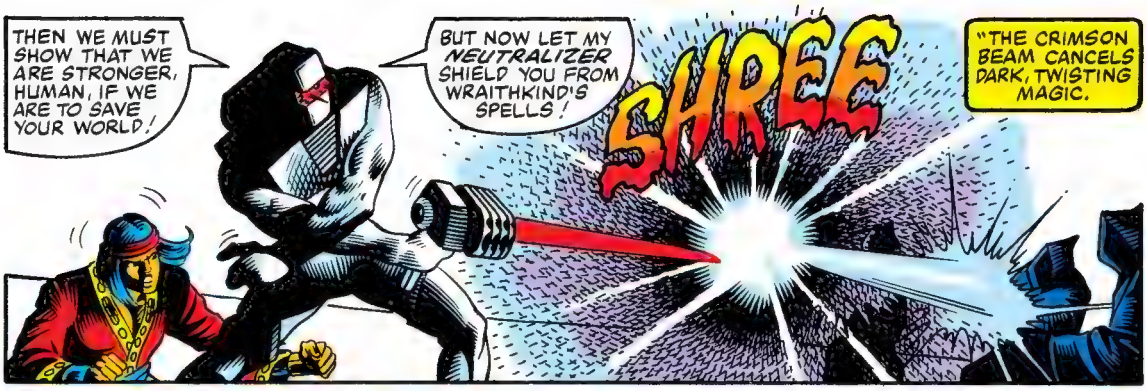
"THE CHILDREN UNWRAP THE MUMMY, BEREFT OF MINDS OF THEIR OWN.

ONLY THE SHINING SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT HAS ANY INKLING OF WHAT IT ALL MEANS.
THE WRAITH'S HOME SYSTEM--THE DREADED DARK NEBULA--IS MOVING INTO A COSMIC ALIGNMENT WITH EARTH!
THE POWER OF WRAITH SORCERY IS NEARING ITS PEAK!
AND THE WRAITHS MEAN TO USE THAT POWER TO WORK EVIL ON EARTH'S CHILDREN!


IN CENTURIES GONE, YOU LEFT YOUR HOME, WITCH-CHILD! HARBINGER OF DOOM! LONG WE SEARCHED THE WAYS OF SPACE--

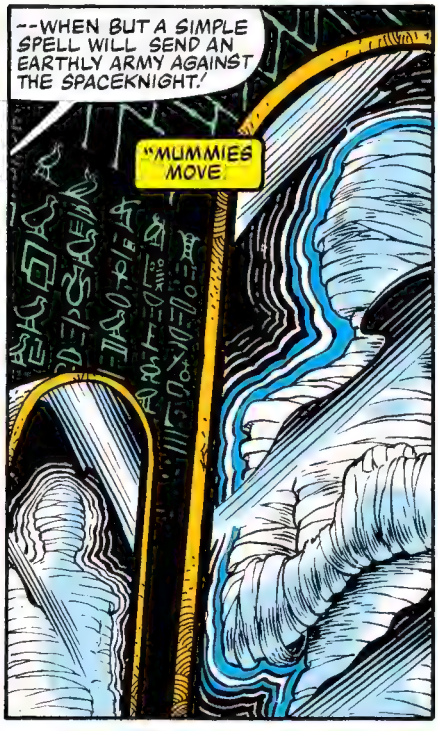
--LONGING FOR SIGHT OF YOUR EVIL FACE!
A CHILD'S FACE IS REVEALED --BEAUTIFUL, UNTOUCHED BY TIME...
...ALIVE!

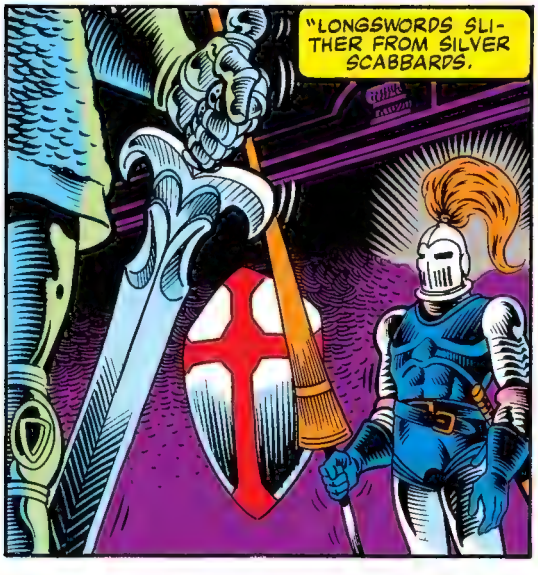

ENOUGH! CEASE THIS MADNESS!
YOUR WORDS BESPEAK YOUR PURPOSE, MAN OF EARTH!
YOU ARE HERE TO HALT THIS HORROR, EVEN AS I AM!
ROM! AND A HUMAN!
"THE DEMONS KNOW THIS SILVER STRANGER WHO APPEARS BESIDE ME, YET HE SAYS HE IS THEIR ENEMY.
"I BELIEVE HIM.
I AM ROM--SPACE-KNIGHT--SON OF GOLDEN GALADOR! MY PURPOSE IS TO CLEANSE EARTH OF THESE CREATURES...
...THESE DIRE WRAITHS!
YOU WILL NOT SUCCEED, SPACE-KNIGHT! THE COSMIC ALIGNMENT DRAWS NIGH! WE ARE STRONG!
AND THE HUMANS THEMSELVES HAVE UNEARTHED ONE WHO WAS LONG LOST TO US!
WHEN WE RESURRECT THE PRINCESS OF POWER, WE SHALL BE STRONGER STILL!
THEN YOUR SPELL MUST BE STOPPED, WRAITH SCUM!
STOP IT THEN, SPACEKNIGHT--IF YOU CAN!
I HAVE SEEN THEIR ILK RAISE THE DEAD, ALIEN! THEIR SORCERY IS STRONG, INDEED!
12


THEN WE MUST SHOW THAT WE ARE STRONGER, HUMAN, IF WE ARE TO SAVE YOUR WORLD!
BUT NOW LET MY NEUTRALIZER SHIELD YOU FROM WRAITHKIND'S SPELLS!
SHREE
"THE CRIMSON BEAM CANCELS DARK, TWISTING MAGIC.

"I KNOW WE MUST BYPASS THAT MAGIC IF WE ARE TO STOP THE CHILDRENS' SINISTER CEREMONY.

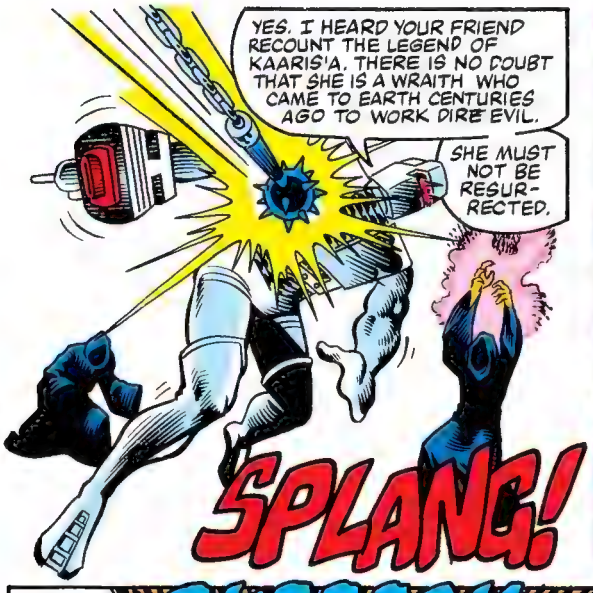
WHY FIGHT ROM OURSELVES, BROTHERS--

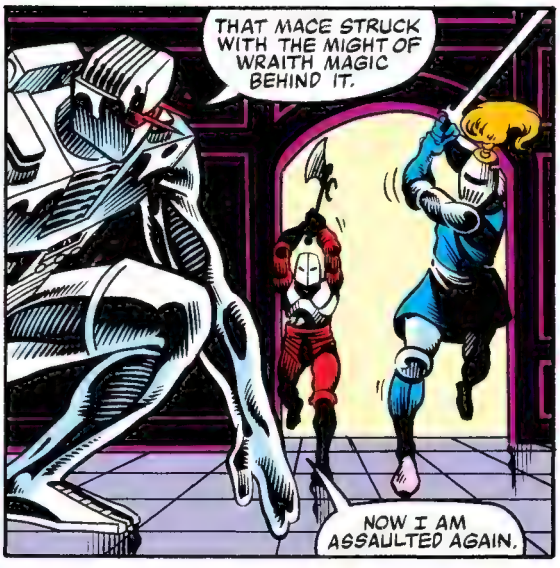

--WHEN BUT A SIMPLE SPELL WILL SEND AN EARTHLY ARMY AGAINST THE SPACEKNIGHT!
"MUMMIES MOVE.


"LONGSWORDS SLITHER FROM SILVER SCABBARDS.

"CREATURES OF CLAY TAKE LIVING BREATH...
"... AND HOWL AND GROWL TO THE VAULTS OF THE CAVERNOUS CHAMBER!
13

I DARE NOT TURN FROM THE SPELLS THEY DIRECT AT US TO DEAL WITH THIS NEW THREAT, HUMAN.
DID YOU NOT SAY IT WAS MY WORLD FOR WHICH YOU FIGHT, ALIEN?
MY WORLD THESE WRAITHS USE AS A SPAWNING GROUND FOR HORROR?
I SEE THAT YOUR WORDS RING TRUE.
THUS, IF YOU WOULD BATTLE WRAITHKIND FOR EARTH, CAN I-- A CHILD OF EARTH-- DO ANY LESS?
NO!
HAAIAAI!
"BUT THE CHILDREN CONTINUE THEIR CEREMONY...
"...OBLIVIOUS OF OUR BATTLE!
THOUGH I HAVE SEEN THAT WRAITH MAGIC IS MIGHTY INDEED--
--I SENSE THAT THE TRUE POWER LIES IN THE CHILD-PRINCESS!
14


YES. I HEARD YOUR FRIEND RECOUNT THE LEGEND OF KAARIS'A. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT SHE IS A WRAITH WHO CAME TO EARTH CENTURIES AGO TO WORK DIRE EVIL.
SHE MUST NOT BE RESURRECTED.
SPLANG!

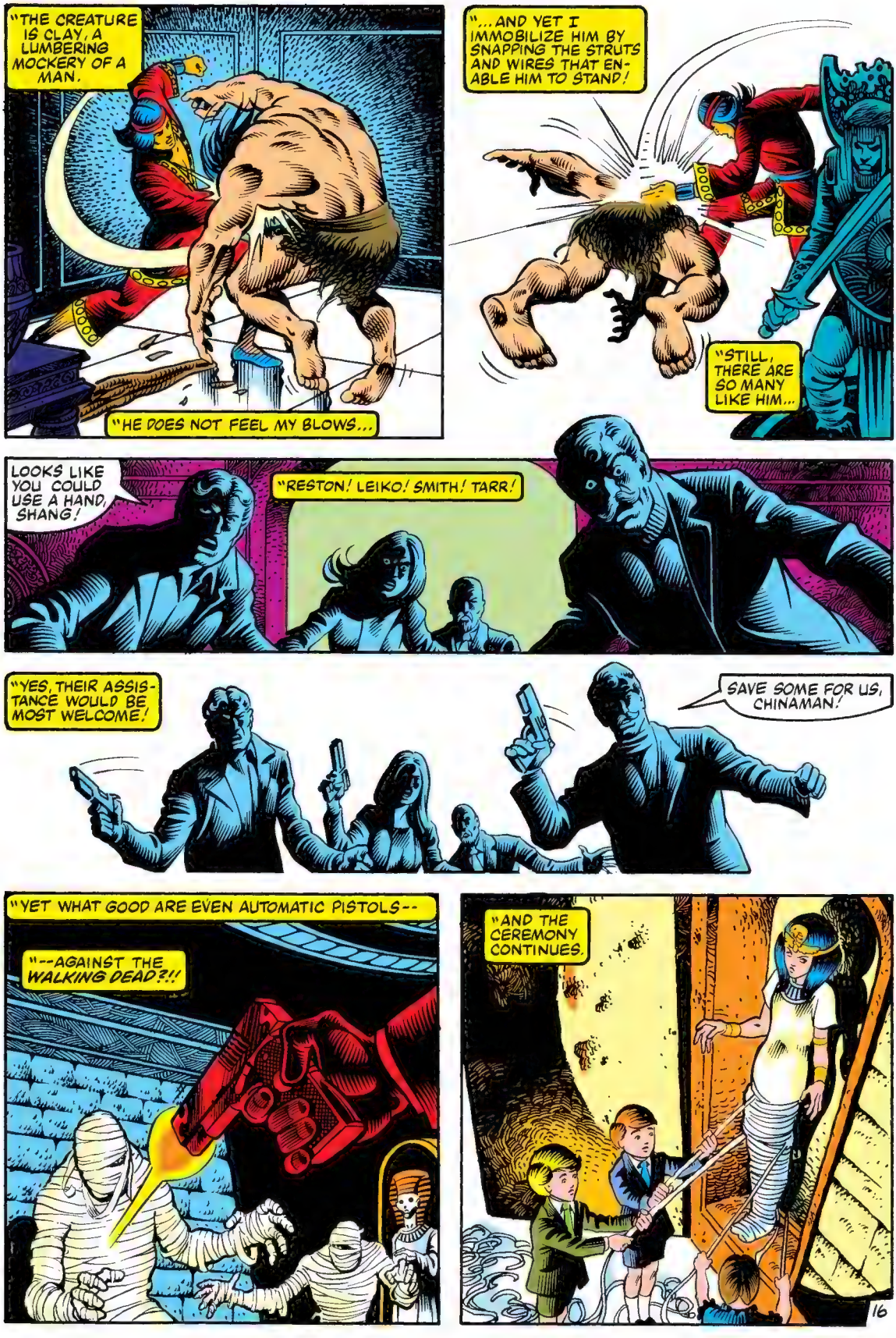

THAT MACE STRUCK WITH THE MIGHT OF WRAITH MAGIC BEHIND IT.
NOW I AM ASSAULTED AGAIN.

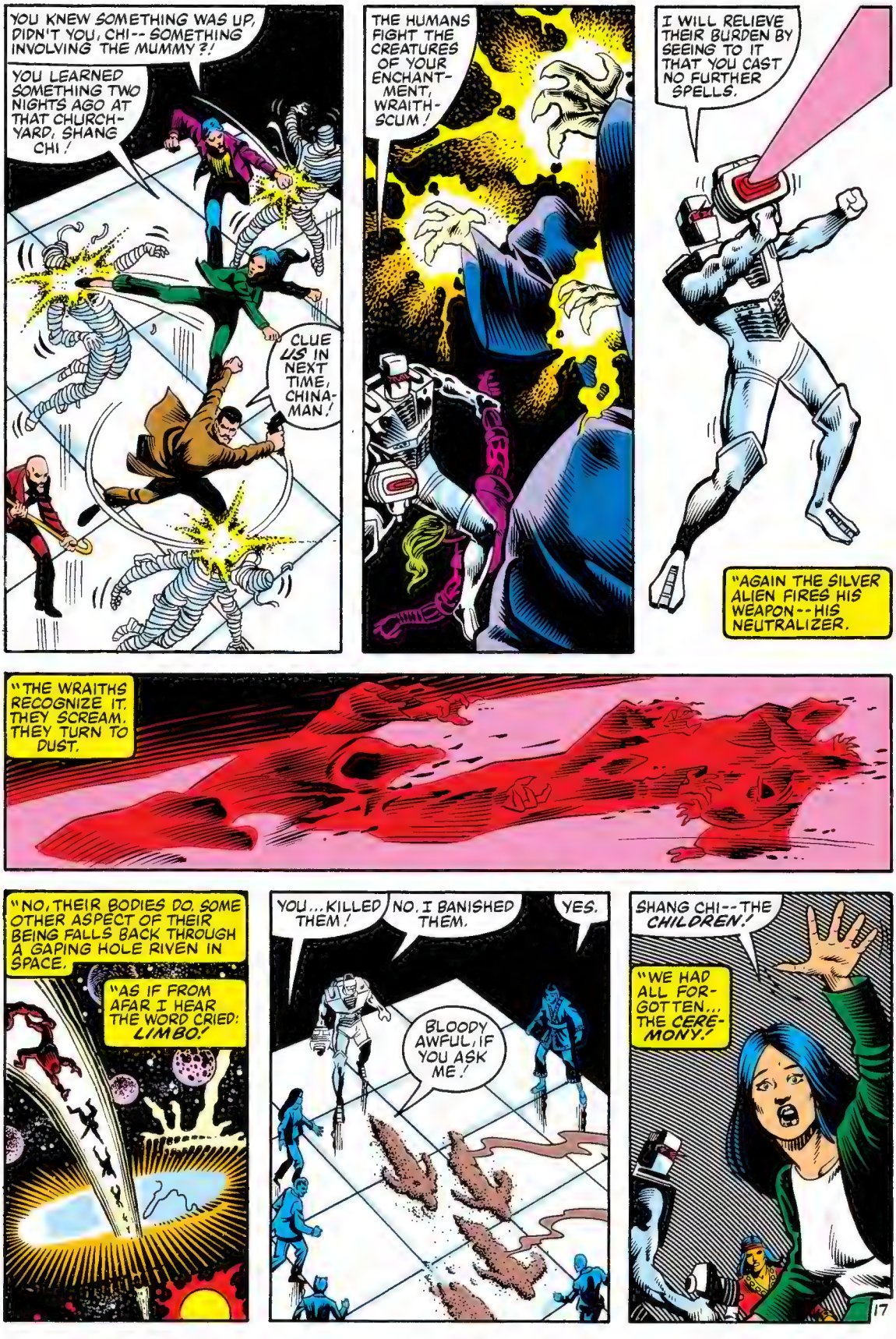
BUT THIS TIME I STAND READY!
SKREEAK
DOES ROM FIND AN ANALOGY TO HIS OWN LOSS OF HUMANITY IN THE EMPTY ARMOR HE STRIKES DOWN?

IF HE DOES, HE SAYS NOTHING.
THE CEREMONY CONTINUES.

"THE CHILD-PRINCESS! I SAW HER HAND MOVE!
"AND, IN TURNING, I GLIMPSED A SHADOW CAST ON THE WALL BEHIND ME.

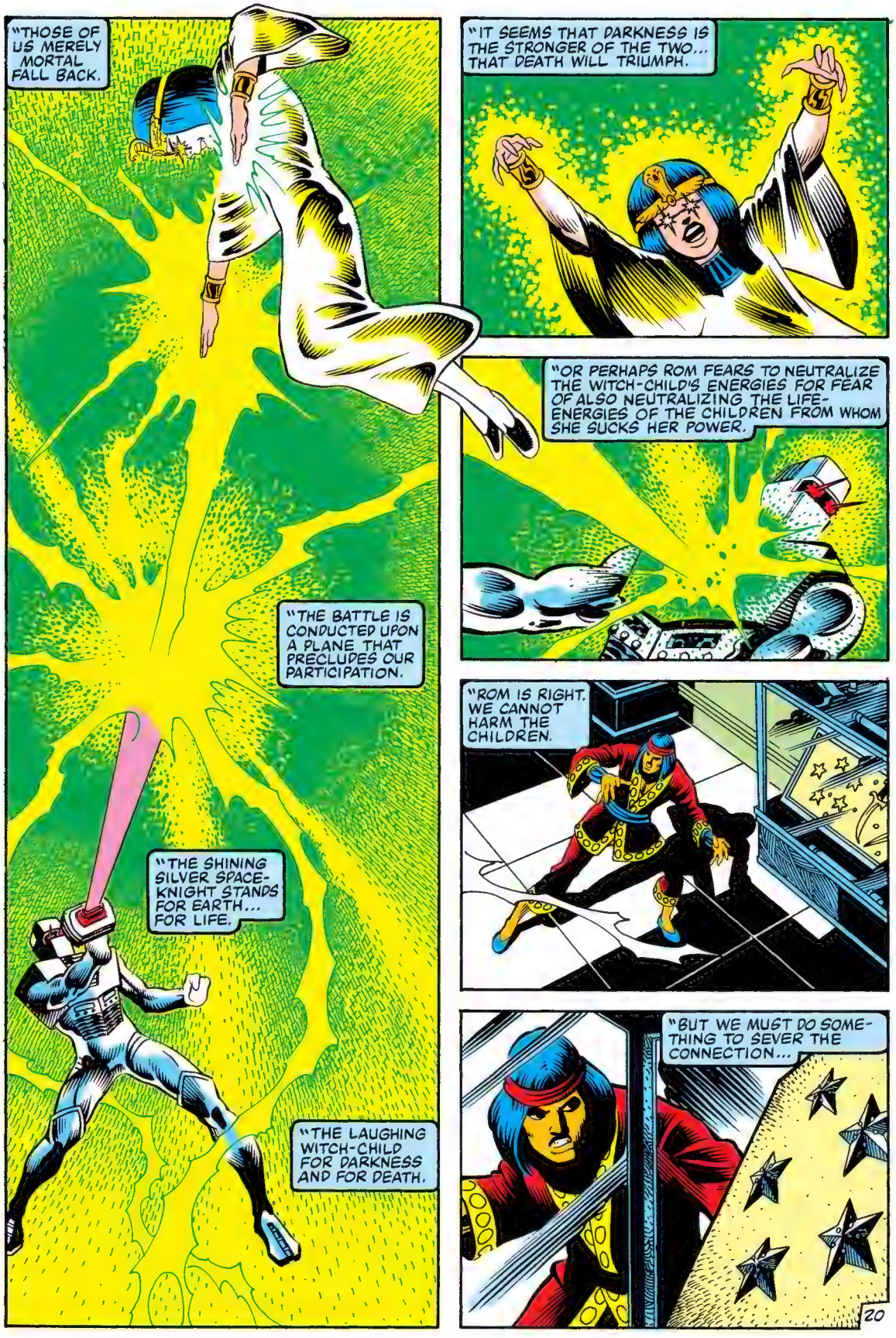
"FOREWARNED, I BRACE MYSELF FOR THE BLOW...
SHRAK
"...AND STRIKE UPWARDS EVEN AS THE CLUB STRIKES DOWN!


"THE CREATURE IS CLAY, A LUMBERING MOCKERY OF A MAN.
"HE DOES NOT FEEL MY BLOWS...
"...AND YET I IMMOBILIZE HIM BY SNAPPING THE STRUTS AND WIRES THAT ENABLE HIM TO STAND!
"STILL, THERE ARE SO MANY LIKE HIM...
LOOKS LIKE YOU COULD USE A HAND, SHANG!
"RESTON! LEIKO! SMITH! TARR!
"YES, THEIR ASSISTANCE WOULD BE MOST WELCOME!
SAVE SOME FOR US, CHINAMAN!
"YET WHAT GOOD ARE EVEN AUTOMATIC PISTOLS--
"--AGAINST THE WALKING DEAD?!!
"AND THE CEREMONY CONTINUES.
16


YOU KNEW SOMETHING WAS UP, DIDN'T YOU, CHI--SOMETHING INVOLVING THE MUMMY?!
YOU LEARNED SOMETHING TWO NIGHTS AGO AT THAT CHURCH-YARD, SHANG CHI!
CLUE US IN NEXT TIME, CHINA-MAN!
THE HUMANS FIGHT THE CREATURES OF YOUR ENCHANT-MENT, WRAITH-SCUM!
I WILL RELIEVE THEIR BURDEN BY SEEING TO IT THAT YOU CAST NO FURTHER SPELLS.
"AGAIN THE SILVER ALIEN FIRES HIS WEAPON--HIS NEUTRALIZER.
"THE WRAITHS RECOGNIZE IT. THEY SCREAM. THEY TURN TO DUST.
"NO, THEIR BODIES DO. SOME OTHER ASPECT OF THEIR BEING FALLS BACK THROUGH A GAPING HOLE RIVEN IN SPACE.
"AS IF FROM AFAR I HEAR THE WORD CRIED: LIMBO!
YOU...KILLED THEM!
NO. I BANISHED THEM.
YES.
BLOODY AWFUL, IF YOU ASK ME.!
SHANG CHI--THE CHILDREN!
"WE HAD ALL FOR-GOTTEN... THE CERE-MONY!
17

"FREE FROM HER MUMMY-WRAPPINGS, THE WITCH-CHILD LIVES!
AFTER CENTURIES OF STIFLING SUFFOCATION, KEPT ALIVE ONLY BY MY MASTERY OF ANCIENT AND ARCANE ARTS--
--KAARIS'A UNLEASHES HER POWER ON THE EARTH AGAIN!
SSSHA H
ARRGH!
SUCH ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DARK NEBULA!
SUCH WOULD WRAITHKIND HAVE THE CHILDREN OF EARTH BECOME!
IT SHALL NOT BE!
"IT MUST NOT BE!
"BUT IF EVEN THE SPACEKNIGHT'S NEUTRALIZER HAS NO EFFECT ON KAARIS'A--
"--WHAT HOPE CAN THERE BE FOR EARTH?
SIR DENIS! D'YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?
YES, TARR! NOW IT BECOMES OBVIOUS HOW THE CHILDREN FIT INTO THIS INSANE SCHEME!
18

"YES! IT IS THE LIFE-ENERGY OF THE CHILDREN UPON WHICH THE WITCH-CHILD FEEDS TO SUSTAIN HERSELF!
"AND WHAT A HUNGER SHE MUST HAVE AFTER LANGUISHING THOUSANDS OF YEARS BENEATH THE DESERT SANDS!
HEAVEN HELP US, THE ONLY WAY TO STOP HER POWER FROM INCREASING--
--IS TO SLAY THE CHILDREN!
NO!
WHEN WE LET THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS, WE BECOME NO BETTER THAN WRAITHKIND ITSELF!
IF WE ARE TO DIE, HUMAN--
--LET OUR DEATHS BE CLEAN!
19


"THOSE OF US MERELY MORTAL FALL BACK.
"THE BATTLE IS CONDUCTED UPON A PLANE THAT PRECLUDES OUR PARTICIPATION.
"THE SHINING SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT STANDS FOR EARTH... FOR LIFE.
"THE LAUGHING WITCH-CHILD FOR DARKNESS AND FOR DEATH.
"IT SEEMS THAT DARKNESS IS THE STRONGER OF THE TWO... THAT DEATH WILL TRIUMPH.
"OR PERHAPS ROM FEARS TO NEUTRALIZE THE WITCH-CHILD'S ENERGIES FOR FEAR OF ALSO NEUTRALIZING THE LIFE-ENERGIES OF THE CHILDREN FROM WHOM SHE SUCKS HER POWER.
"ROM IS RIGHT. WE CANNOT HARM THE CHILDREN.
"BUT WE MUST DO SOMETHING TO SEVER THE CONNECTION...
20

SKRASH
FWHIZZZZ
SNIK
SNIK
SNIK
"I HAVE DONE THAT WHICH WAS NECESSARY."
21

DID YOU SEE? THE WITCH-PRINCESS TURNED TO DUST!
THE CHILDREN! THEY'RE COLLAPSING!
"WAS IT ALL FOR NOTHING, THEN? DID I ACT IN ERROR?

NEXT MONTH: PIPER OF PERIL!

60¢
40
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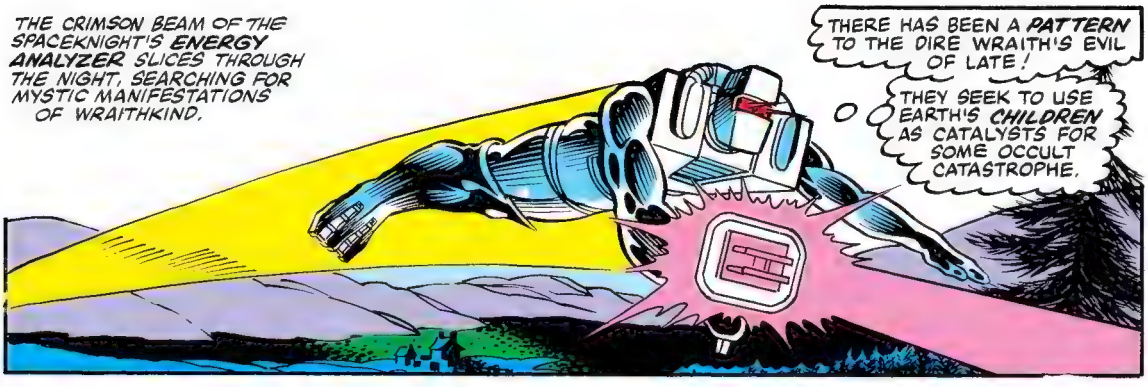
ROM
SPACEKNIGHT
LEIALOHA

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPTER
SAL BUSCEMA PENCILER
AKIN & GARVEY INKERS
NOVAK, LETTERS SEAN, COLORS
ANN NOCENTI EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
PIPER OF PERIL!
BY THE MOON-GLOW'S HOARY LIGHT, BY THE TWISTING MISTS OF NIGHT--
--ACROSS THE TRACKLESS WASTES OF SPACE, COME EVIL NOW UNTO THIS PLACE!
LET US SEE THY HORRID FACE!
SINISTER SPELLS CAST UPON THE SCOTTISH MOORS BODE ILL FOR EARTH... AND ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!

IN CACKLING CONVOCATION IS THIS COVEN OF DIRE WRAITH HIGH WITCHES MET THIS NIGHT...
THE TIME DRAWS NIGH, MY SISTERS DEAR, WHEN OUR DARK POWERS SHALL BE AT THEIR PEAK!
SOON, ACROSS THE UNIMAGINABLE EXPANSE OF SPACE, THE BLACK SUN OF OUR OWN DREADED DARK NEBULA SHALL MOVE INTO A COSMIC ALIGNMENT--
--WITH THIS PALE, PATHETIC PLANET CALLED BY ITS HUMAN INHABITANTS... EARTH!
TOUCHED BY OUR SUN'S EBON RAYS, OUR SORCERY WILL BE AT ITS STRONGEST!
YOU HAD BEST USE IT WELL THEN, WITCH, FOR THUS FAR WRAITH SORCERY HAS FARED NO BETTER THAN WRAITH SCIENCE AGAINST ROM!
LIAR! MANY SPELLS HAVE WE WROUGHT IN RECENT DAYS!
"THE FIRST PITTED THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT AGAINST OUR MOST VICIOUS HOUND OF HELL!*
*ROM #33 --ANN.
2

"THE SECOND SAW THE SPACEKNIGHT AND THE SAVAGE SUB-MARINER BESET BY A SUBSURFACE MENACE RAISED BY OUR SORCERY!*
*ROM #34-35--ANN AGAIN.
"THE THIRD LET LOOSE A MYSTIC SPELL THAT SHOULD HAVE SLAIN ROM!*
*ROM #36-37--GUESS WHO.
"AND, LASTLY, VICTORY WAS ALMOST OURS WHEN WE RESURRECTED A WRAITH MENACE FROM ANCIENT TIME!*
*ROM #38-39--GEE, YOU GUESSED!
YOU BOAST OF YOUR MYSTIC MIGHT YET IN EACH CASE YOU FAILED TO SLAY THE SPACEKNIGHT--FAILED TO DOMINATE EARTH'S CHILDREN...
...WHO MUST BE DOMINATED IF OUR CURRENT SCHEME IS TO SUCCEED!
WE FAILED BECAUSE, IN EACH CASE, EARTH RAISED ITS OWN DEFENSES--ITS OWN CHAMPIONS--TO AID THE STINKING SPACEKNIGHT!
THIS TIME NOTHING WILL KEEP EARTH'S CHILDREN FROM OUR CONTROL!
AGAIN MUTTERED INCANTATIONS RISE, POLLUTING THE PURITY OF THE SCOTTISH NIGHT.
3

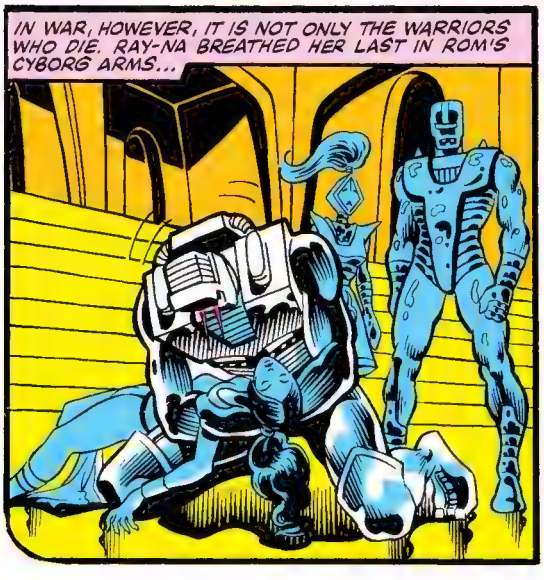
THE SAME NIGHT THROUGH WHICH SOARS...
ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
NEVER HAS WRAITH MAGIC SEEMED SO MIGHTY-- WRAITH SORCERY SO STRONG!
I HAVE THWARTED THE EVIL ONES MANY TIMES ALREADY-- BUT THEY WILL TRY AGAIN!
I MUST BE READY, FOR I AM SWORN TO SAFEGUARD THIS WORLD!
4

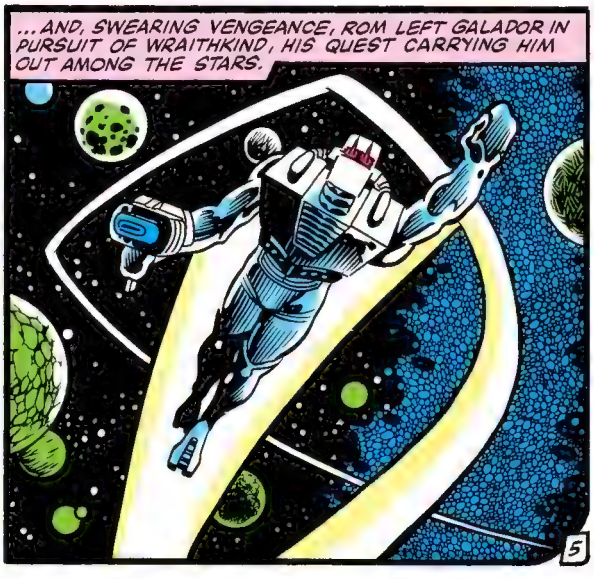

THE CRIMSON BEAM OF THE SPACEKNIGHT'S ENERGY ANALYZER SLICES THROUGH THE NIGHT, SEARCHING FOR MYSTIC MANIFESTATIONS OF WRAITHKIND.
THERE HAS BEEN A PATTERN TO THE DIRE WRAITH'S EVIL OF LATE!
THEY SEEK TO USE EARTH'S CHILDREN AS CATALYSTS FOR SOME OCCULT CATASTROPHE.

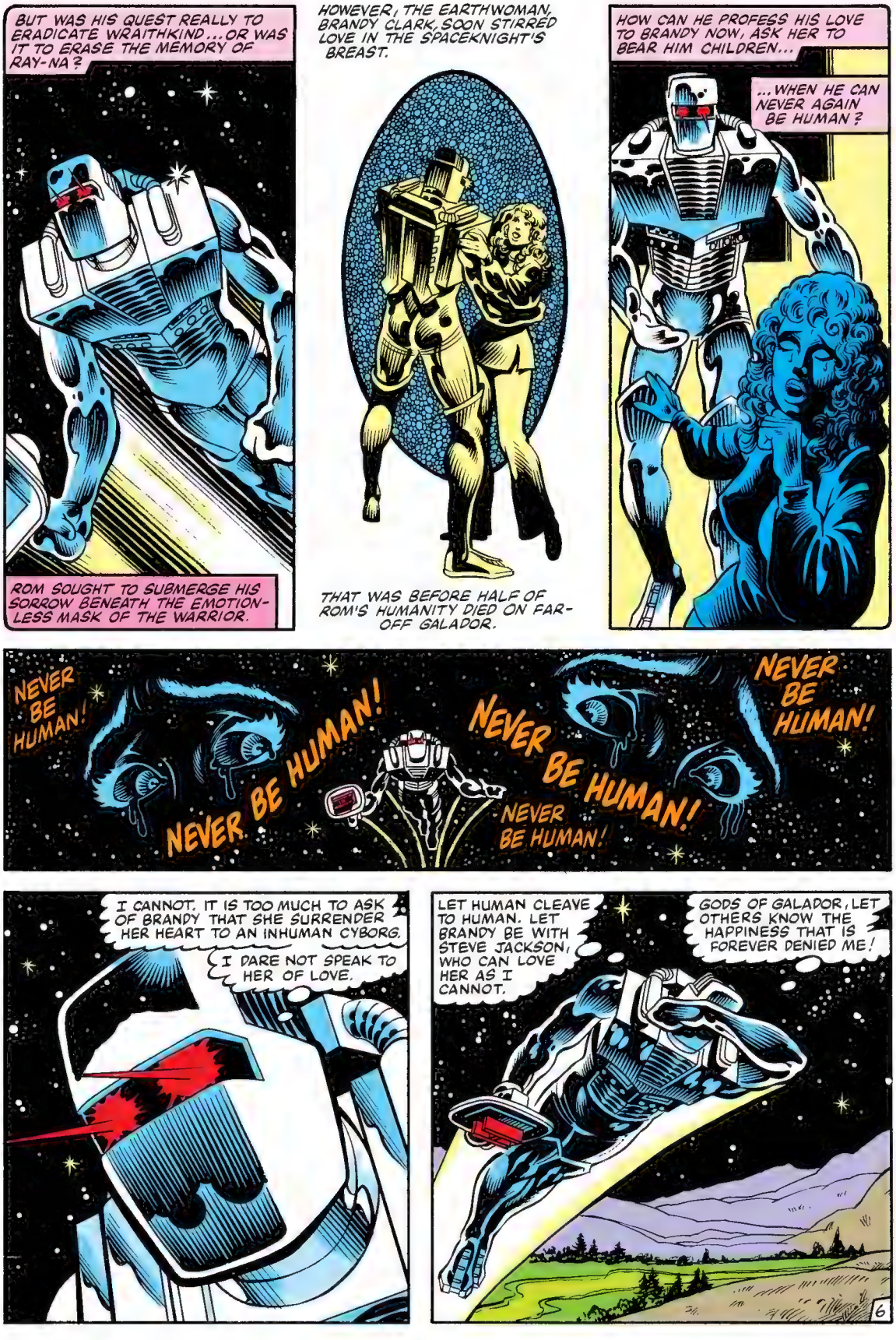
ROM'S MIND DRIFTS BACK THROUGH TIME AND SPACE, TO GOLDEN GALADOR.

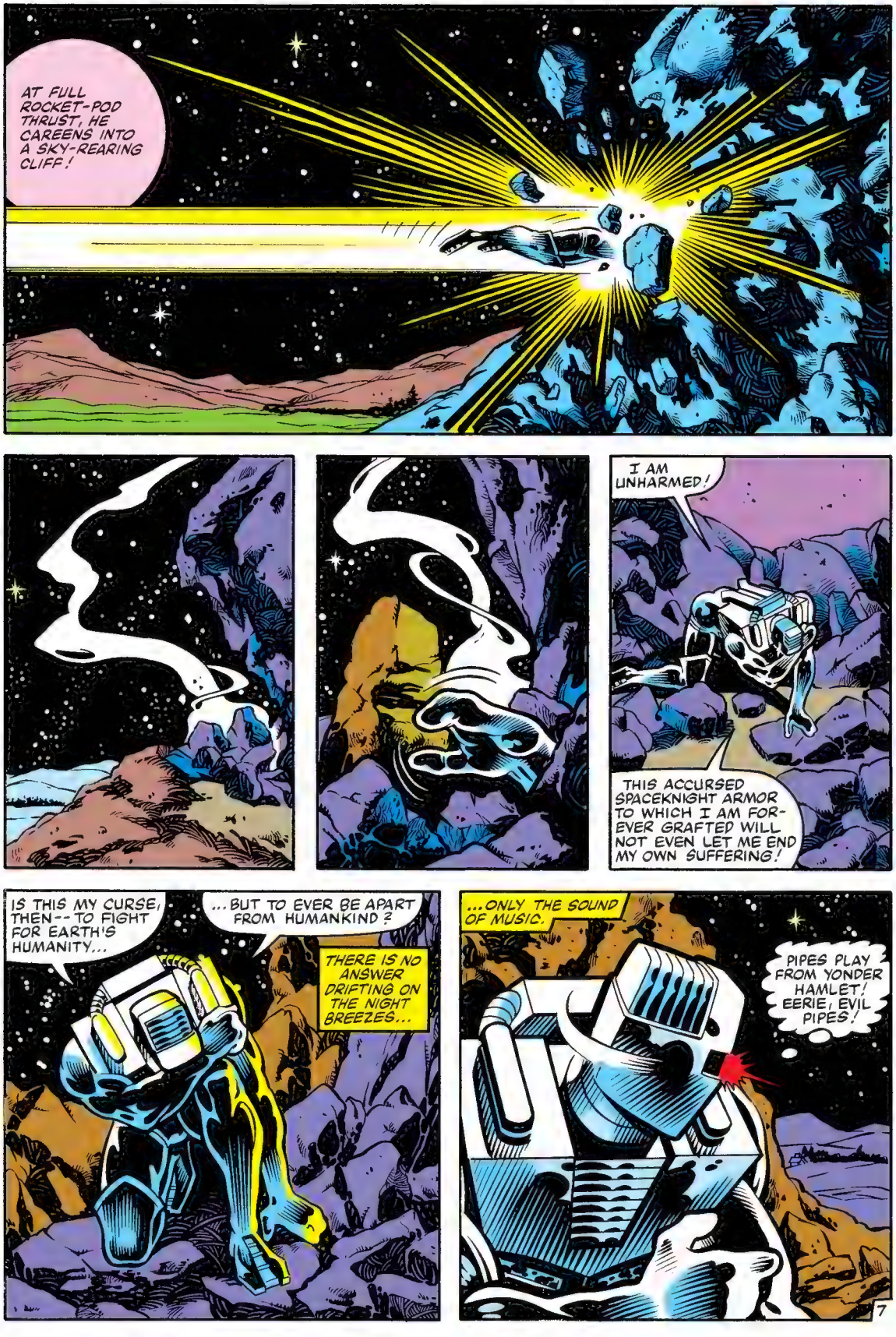
THERE, HE AND HIS BELOVED RAY-NA ONCE SPOKE OF MARRIAGE, OF HAVING CHILDREN.

THAT WAS BEFORE THE COMING OF THE DREAD DIRE WRAITHS FORCED ROM AND OTHERS LIKE HIM...
...TO SACRIFICE THEIR HUMANITY AND BECOME SPACEKNIGHTS IN GALADOR'S DEFENSE.

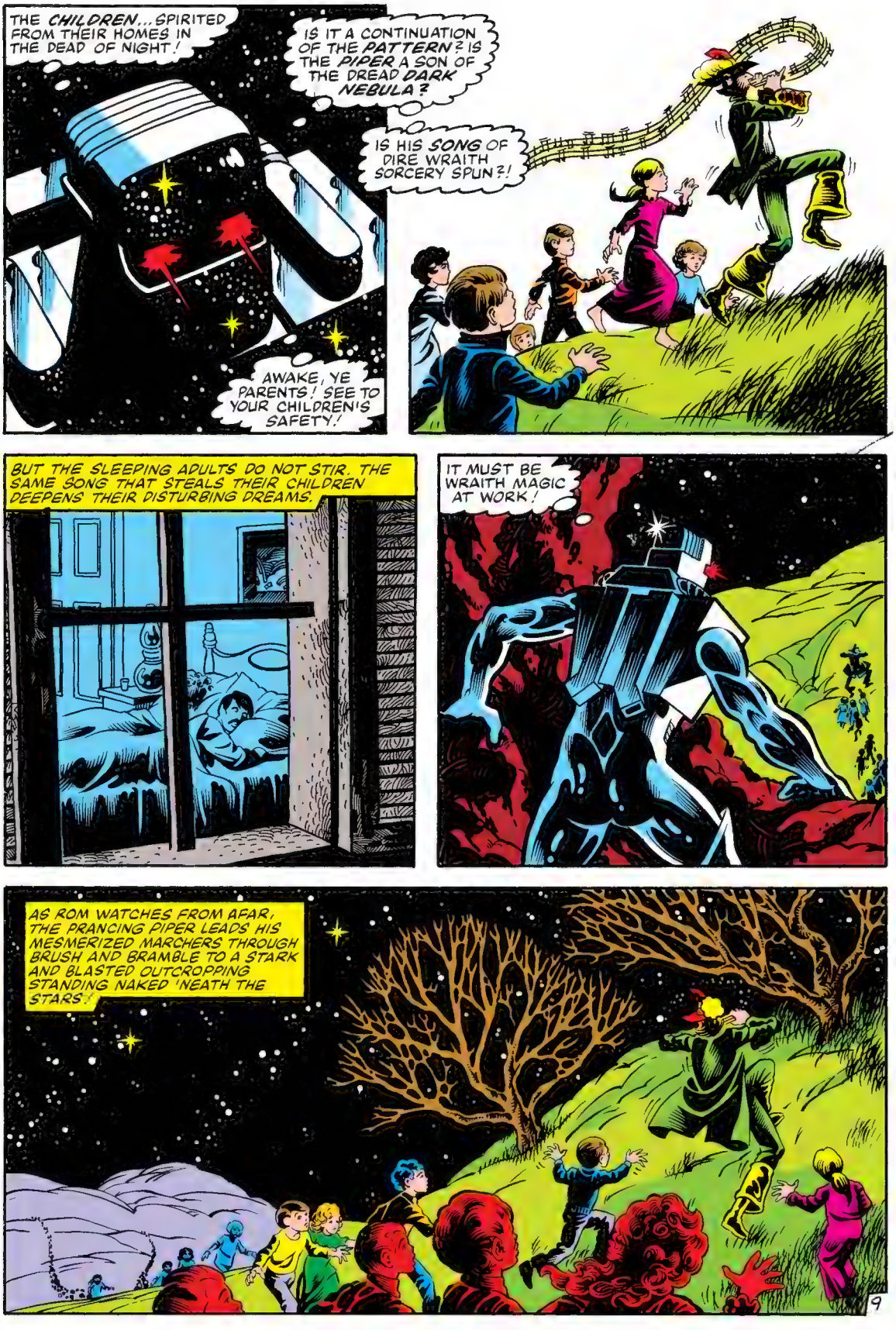

IN WAR, HOWEVER, IT IS NOT ONLY THE WARRIORS WHO DIE. RAY-NA BREATHED HER LAST IN ROM'S CYBORG ARMS...

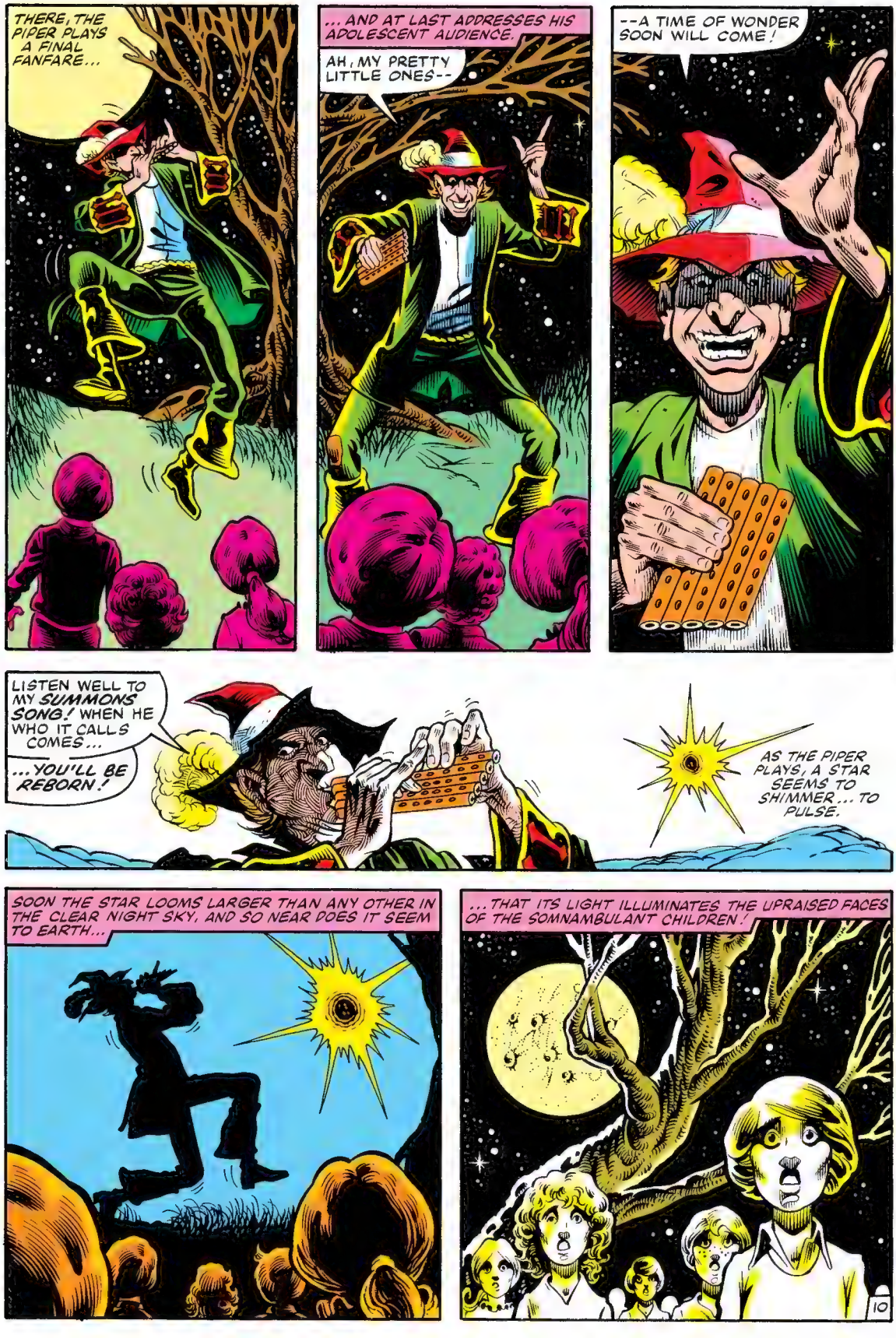

...AND, SWEARING VENGEANCE, ROM LEFT GALADOR IN PURSUIT OF WRAITHKIND, HIS QUEST CARRYING HIM OUT AMONG THE STARS.
5

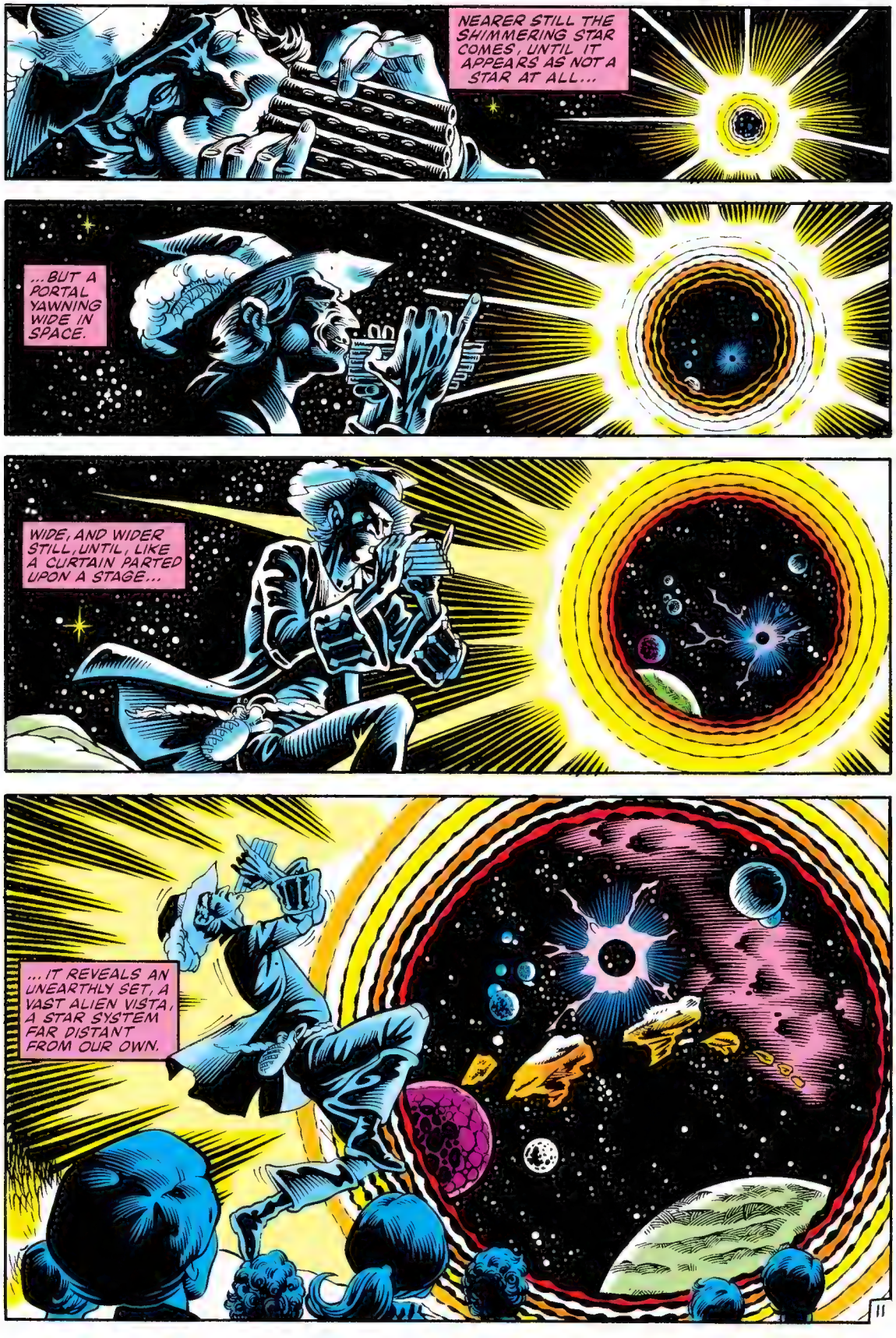

BUT WAS HIS QUEST REALLY TO ERADICATE WRAITHKIND...OR WAS IT TO ERASE THE MEMORY OF RAY-NA?
ROM SOUGHT TO SUBMERGE HIS SORROW BENEATH THE EMOTIONLESS MASK OF THE WARRIOR.
HOWEVER, THE EARTHWOMAN, BRANDY CLARK, SOON STIRRED LOVE IN THE SPACEKNIGHT'S BREAST.
THAT WAS BEFORE HALF OF ROM'S HUMANITY DIED ON FAR-OFF GALADOR.
HOW CAN HE PROFESS HIS LOVE TO BRANDY NOW, ASK HER TO BEAR HIM CHILDREN...
...WHEN HE CAN NEVER AGAIN BE HUMAN?
NEVER BE HUMAN!
NEVER BE HUMAN!
NEVER BE HUMAN!
NEVER BE HUMAN!
NEVER BE HUMAN!
I CANNOT. IT IS TOO MUCH TO ASK OF BRANDY THAT SHE SURRENDER HER HEART TO AN INHUMAN CYBORG.
I DARE NOT SPEAK TO HER OF LOVE.
LET HUMAN CLEAVE TO HUMAN. LET BRANDY BE WITH STEVE JACKSON, WHO CAN LOVE HER AS I CANNOT.
GODS OF GALADOR, LET OTHERS KNOW THE HAPPINESS THAT IS FOREVER DENIED ME!
6


AT FULL ROCKET-POD THRUST, HE CAREENS INTO A SKY-REARING CLIFF!
I AM UNHARMED!
THIS ACCURSED SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR TO WHICH I AM FOREVER GRAFTED WILL NOT EVEN LET ME END MY OWN SUFFERING!
IS THIS MY CURSE, THEN-- TO FIGHT FOR EARTH'S HUMANITY...
...BUT TO EVER BE APART FROM HUMANKIND?
THERE IS NO ANSWER DRIFTING ON THE NIGHT BREEZES...
...ONLY THE SOUND OF MUSIC.
PIPES PLAY FROM YONDER HAMLET! EERIE, EVIL PIPES!
7

AND THEY DRAW IN THEIR WAKE... THE CHILDREN!
THE CHILDREN...
MESMERIZED BY THE MOURNFUL MUSIC THAT GOES UNHEARD BY THEIR SLUMBERING PARENTS, THEY STREAM, STILL IN NIGHTSHIRTS, FROM THEIR HOUSES...
...TO DANCE AFTER THE GANGLING GREMLIN WHOSE PIPES LEAD THEM ON INTO THE CHILL OF NIGHT, ON INTO PERIL!
8


THE CHILDREN... SPIRITED FROM THEIR HOMES IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT!
IS IT A CONTINUATION OF THE PATTERN? IS THE PIPER A SON OF THE DREAD DARK NEBULA?
IS HIS SONG OF DIRE WRAITH SORCERY SPUN?!
AWAKE, YE PARENTS! SEE TO YOUR CHILDREN'S SAFETY!
BUT THE SLEEPING ADULTS DO NOT STIR. THE SAME SONG THAT STEALS THEIR CHILDREN DEEPENS THEIR DISTURBING DREAMS.
IT MUST BE WRAITH MAGIC AT WORK!
AS ROM WATCHES FROM AFAR, THE PRANCING PIPER LEADS HIS MESMERIZED MARCHERS THROUGH BRUSH AND BRAMBLE TO A STARK AND BLASTED OUTCROPPING STANDING NAKED 'NEATH THE STARS!
9

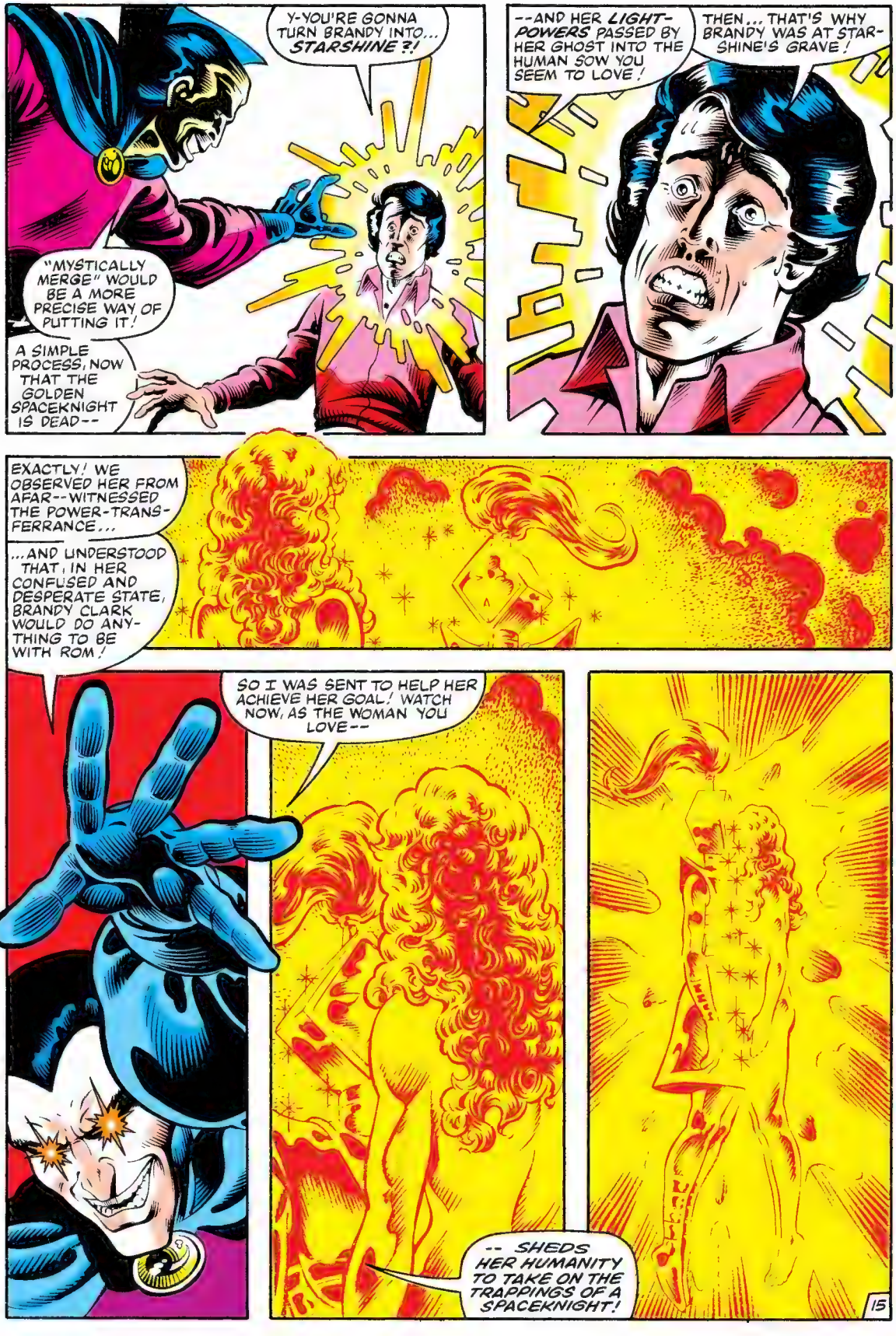

THERE, THE PIPER PLAYS A FINAL FANFARE...
...AND AT LAST ADDRESSES HIS ADOLESCENT AUDIENCE.
AH, MY PRETTY LITTLE ONES--
--A TIME OF WONDER SOON WILL COME!
LISTEN WELL TO MY SUMMONS SONG! WHEN HE WHO IT CALLS COMES...
...YOU'LL BE REBORN!
AS THE PIPER PLAYS, A STAR SEEMS TO SHIMMER... TO PULSE.
SOON THE STAR LOOMS LARGER THAN ANY OTHER IN THE CLEAR NIGHT SKY, AND SO NEAR DOES IT SEEM TO EARTH...
...THAT ITS LIGHT ILLUMINATES THE UPRAISED FACES OF THE SOMNAMBULANT CHILDREN!
10


NEARER STILL THE SHIMMERING STAR COMES, UNTIL IT APPEARS AS NOT A STAR AT ALL...
...BUT A PORTAL YAWNING WIDE IN SPACE.
WIDE, AND WIDER STILL, UNTIL, LIKE A CURTAIN PARTED UPON A STAGE...
...IT REVEALS AN UNEARTHLY SET, A VAST ALIEN VISTA, A STAR SYSTEM FAR DISTANT FROM OUR OWN.

WITNESS: THE DEADLY DARK NEBULA!
A LOVELY SIGHT, ISN'T IT, MY LITTLE PRETTIES!
THROUGH THIS PORTAL SOON SHALL STREAM, A THING OF NIGHTMARES, NOT OF DREAMS! WELCOME HIM! HE COMES FOR YOU! TO BRING A CHANGE THE EARTH WILL RUE!
NO, PERILOUS PIPER! SUCH EVIL SHALL NOT BE!
EH? WHO--?!
12

ROM, SPACEKNIGHT! SON OF GOLDEN GALADOR! SCOURGE OF WRAITHKIND! PROTECTOR OF THE PLANET EARTH!
I SENSE THAT TONIGHT IS THE NIGHT EARTH AND WRAITHWORLD COME INTO COSMIC ALIGNMENT-- THAT TONIGHT WRAITH MAGIC WILL BE AT ITS PEAK!
I STAND BEFORE YOUR COSMIC PORTAL, PIPER! BETWEEN THE RAYS OF THE BLACK SUN AND THOSE WHO DESIRE ITS POWER!
TO USE ITS RAYS TO TRANSFORM THESE SLEEPING INNOCENTS, YOU MUST FIRST WIN PAST... ME!
13

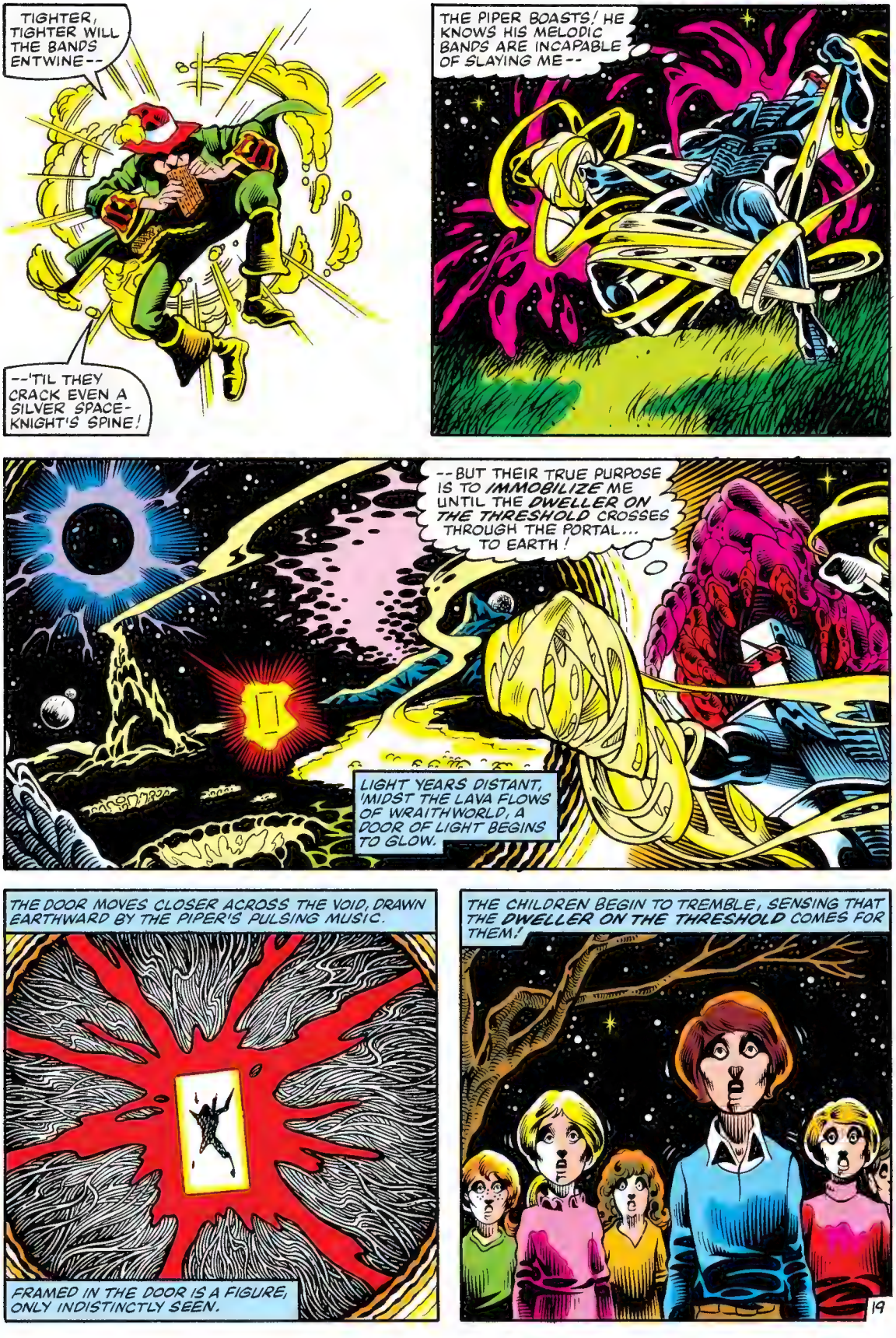
CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA...
IN A SMALL PHARMACEUTICAL LABORATORY ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN, LIGHTS HAVE BEEN SHINING THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT.
THEY ARE NOT LIGHTS OF NATURAL OR MANMADE ORIGIN, HOWEVER...
BORATORY
TORY
...BUT MANIFESTATIONS OF THE MYSTIC MIGHT OF THE DIABOLICAL DOCTOR DREDD!
SO YOU'VE COME TO SAVE YOUR LADY FAIR, EH, HUMAN? HOW GALLANT! BUT WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IF I TOLD YOU THAT BRANDY CLARK DOES NOT WISH TO BE SAVED?
IT'S TRUE, YOU KNOW! SHE NO LONGER DESIRES TO BE HUMAN, FOR IT'S HUMANITY THAT SEPARATES HER FROM HER BELOVED ROM!
AND, SENSING HER DESIRES FROM AFAR, I COULD ONLY TAKE THE CHIVALROUS COURSE-- AND HELP THE LADY ATTAIN THE INHUMANITY SHE WANTS!
14


Y-YOU'RE GONNA TURN BRANDY INTO... STARSHINE?!
"MYSTICALLY MERGE" WOULD BE A MORE PRECISE WAY OF PUTTING IT!
A SIMPLE PROCESS, NOW THAT THE GOLDEN SPACEKNIGHT IS DEAD--
--AND HER LIGHT-POWERS PASSED BY HER GHOST INTO THE HUMAN SOW YOU SEEM TO LOVE!
THEN... THAT'S WHY BRANDY WAS AT STAR-SHINE'S GRAVE!
EXACTLY! WE OBSERVED HER FROM AFAR--WITNESSED THE POWER-TRANS-FERRANCE...
...AND UNDERSTOOD THAT, IN HER CONFUSED AND DESPERATE STATE, BRANDY CLARK WOULD DO ANY-THING TO BE WITH ROM!
SO I WAS SENT TO HELP HER ACHIEVE HER GOAL! WATCH NOW, AS THE WOMAN YOU LOVE--
-- SHEDS HER HUMANITY TO TAKE ON THE TRAPPINGS OF A SPACEKNIGHT!
15

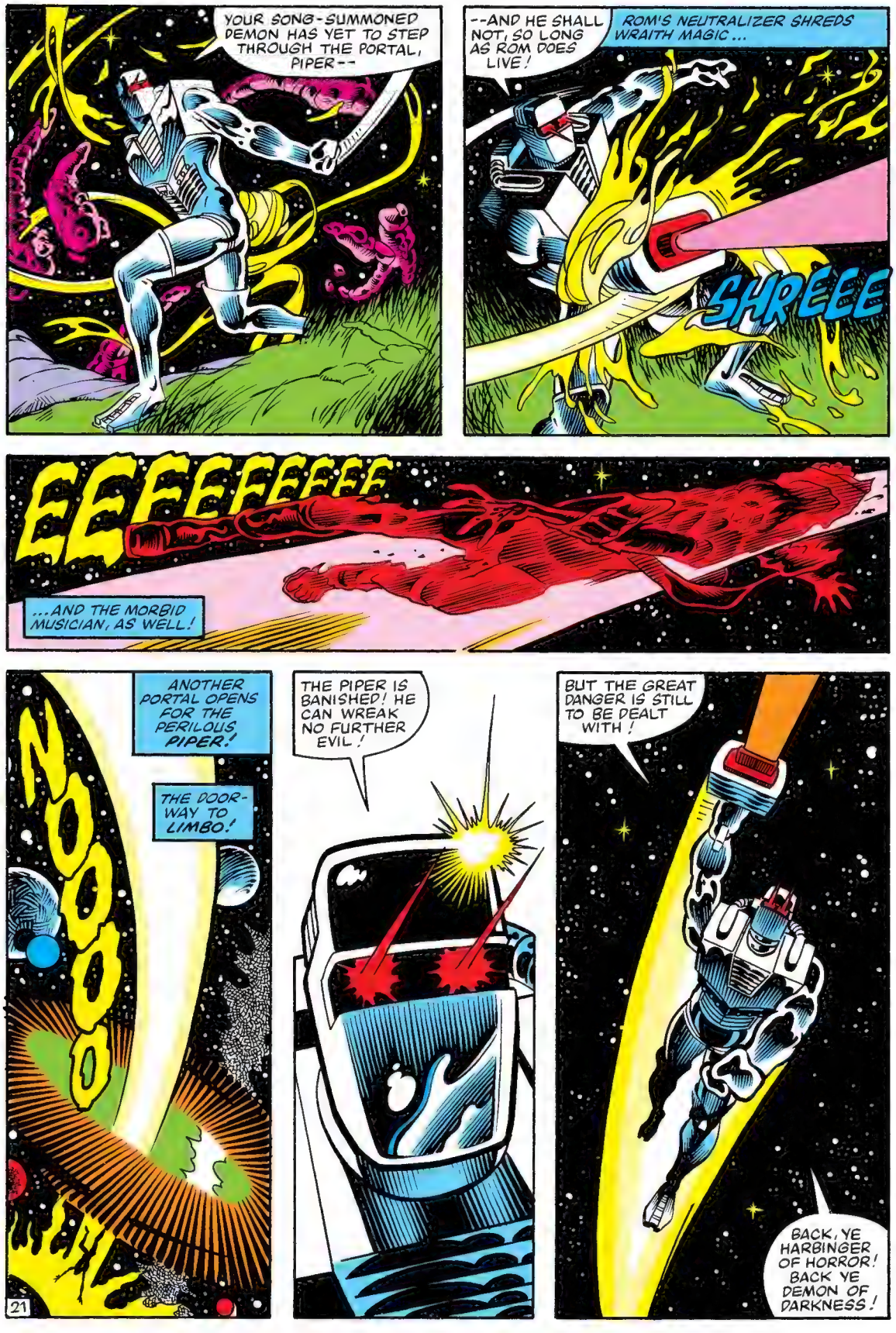
NO!
WHO? AH, THE TORPEDO!
MY DETECTOR VISOR--POWERED BY ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER--LETS ME SEE YOU AS YOU TRULY ARE... WRAITH!
I AM MORE THAN A MERE WRAITH, HUMAN!
I AM A WRAITH WARLOCK, ONE OF THE FEW OF MY KIND, MY MYSTIC SISTERS HAVING USURPED SORCERY FOR THEMSELVES!
A SPELL LEAPS FROM DREDD'S FINGER-TIPS...
BUT THOSE OF US MALES WHO COMMAND THE MYSTIC ARTS ARE MIGHTY INDEED!
...AND THE VERY AIR SEEMS TO CLAW AT THE THRUSTING TORPEDO!
I FOLLOWED STEVE HERE--WORRIED AS HE WAS OVER BRANDY'S DISAPPEARANCE!
BUT I NEVER THOUGHT I'D HAVE TO GO UP AGAINST WRAITH MAGIC --NOT AFTER ROM CLEANSED CLAIRTON OF WRAITHKIND!
WITH A SUPREME EFFORT OF WILL, THE TORPEDO SHUTS OUT THE SPELLS--
--AND SMASHES DREDD DOWN WITH A JET POWER PUNCH.
ARRGHH!
16

SMAKK!
GET UP, YOU STINKING, SHAPE-SHIFTER!
GET UP SO I CAN SMASH YOU DOWN AGAIN!
TORPEDO, LOOK OUT-- BEHIND YOU!
STEVE JACKSON'S WARNING COMES TOO LATE...
...AS A BEAM OF LIGHT STRIKES THE TORPEDO WITH NERVE-NUMBING PHYSICAL IMPACT!
I NEGLECTED TO MENTION THE BARGAIN THAT BRANDY CLARK UNWITTINGLY STRUCK WITH ME WHEN I TRANSFERRED HER-- BODY AND SOUL-- INTO THE ARMOR OF STARSHINE!
AS A SPACEKNIGHT, SHE WOULD BE WRAITHKIND'S TO CONTROL!
OUR SECRET WEAPON AGAINST ALL ENEMIES, TORPEDO, SUCH AS YOU... AND ROM!
17

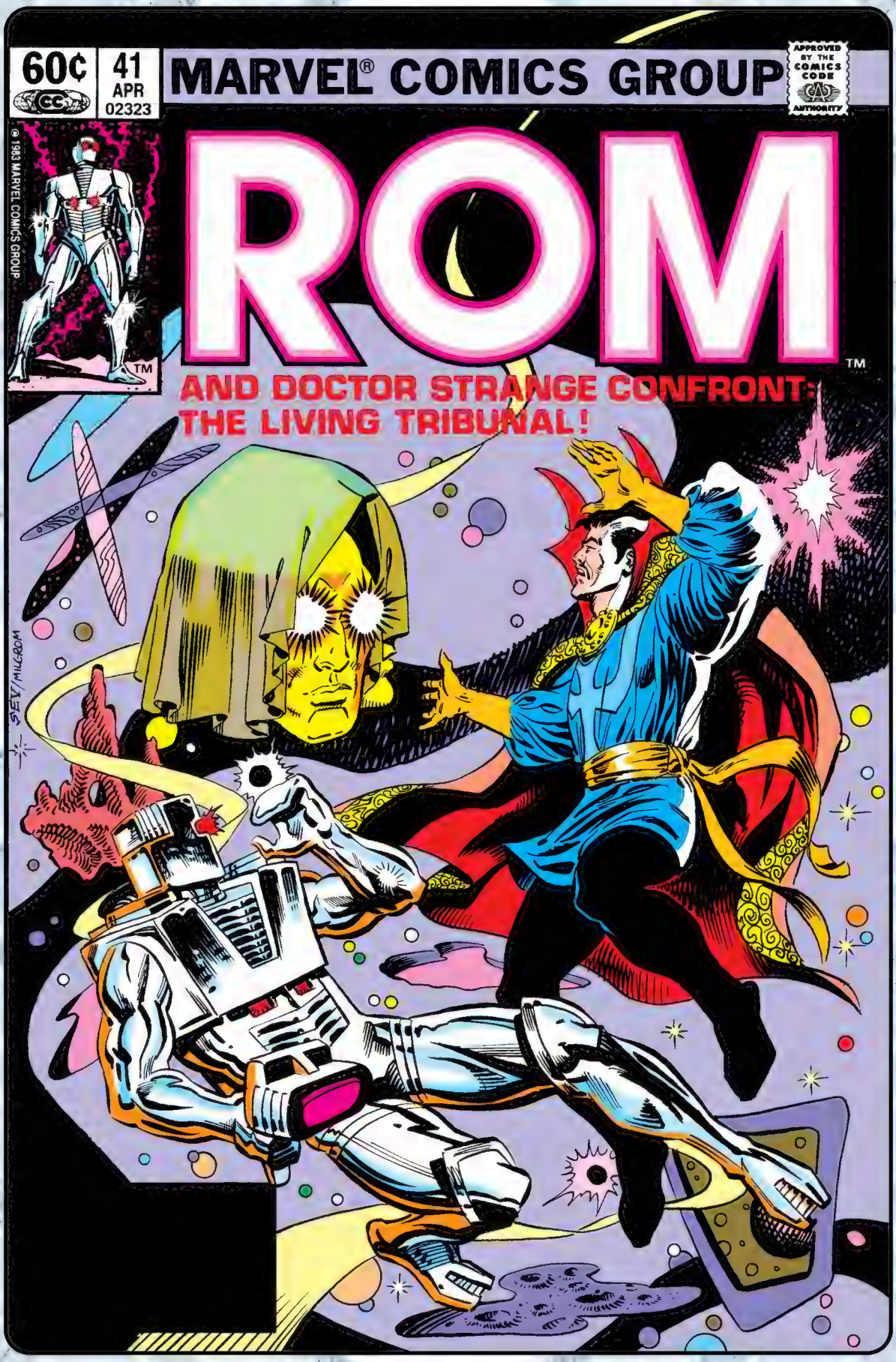
MEANWHILE, AN OCEAN AWAY...
NO NEED FOR YOUR ENERGY ANALYZER, ROM!
I AM A DIRE WRAITH!
YOU FREELY ADMIT IT, SHAPE-SHIFTER?
THE TIME FOR HIDING -- FOR DEMEANING OURSELVES BY ADOPTING THESE DISGUSTING HUMAN DISGUISES -- WILL SOON BE DONE!
OUR MOMENT OF POWER IS AT HAND!
THE PORTAL OPENS! SOON, THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHHOLD WILL ARRIVE!
AT THAT MOMENT, THE CHILDREN WILL BE TRANSFORMED--
--AND ALL HUMANITY WILL BE DOOMED!
GODS OF GOLDEN GALADOR, THE MUSIC TAKES ON PHYSICAL FORM, BINDING ME WITH BANDS OF FORCE!
18


TIGHTER, TIGHTER WILL THE BANDS ENTWINE--
--'TIL THEY CRACK EVEN A SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT'S SPINE!
THE PIPER BOASTS! HE KNOWS HIS MELODIC BANDS ARE INCAPABLE OF SLAYING ME--
--BUT THEIR TRUE PURPOSE IS TO IMMOBILIZE ME UNTIL THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD CROSSES THROUGH THE PORTAL... TO EARTH!
LIGHT YEARS DISTANT, 'MIDST THE LAVA FLOWS OF WRAITHWORLD, A DOOR OF LIGHT BEGINS TO GLOW.
THE DOOR MOVES CLOSER ACROSS THE VOID, DRAWN EARTHWARD BY THE PIPER'S PULSING MUSIC.
FRAMED IN THE DOOR IS A FIGURE, ONLY INDISTINCTLY SEEN.
THE CHILDREN BEGIN TO TREMBLE, SENSING THAT THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD COMES FOR THEM!
19

AT LAST I KNOW WHAT THE WRAITHS INTEND! THE DWELLER IS A MYSTIC EMBODIMENT OF THE DARK NEBULA'S BLACK SUN!
HE IS WRAITH MAGIC INCARNATE!
IF HE STEPS THROUGH THE PORTAL TO EARTH...
THE CHILDREN SHALL BE OURS, ROM!
YOU'VE SEEN WHAT OUR MAGIC HAS ALREADY DONE TO HARMLESS EARTH CURS... CHANGED THEM INTO SAVAGE, SUBSERVIENT HELLHOUNDS!
IMAGINE, THEN, HOW THE DWELLER CAN TRANSFORM THESE CHILDREN!
I CAN IMAGINE IT! IT IS A NIGHTMARE! THE CHILDREN WILL BECOME WRAITH-SLAVES--MINDLESS MENIALS POSSESSED OF INCREDIBLE POWERS...
...ALL TO BE TURNED AGAINST THEIR OWN WORLD!
THIS IS THE FINAL BATTLE, ROM --AND YOU HAVE ALREADY LOST!
THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD ...IS HERE!!!
20


YOUR SONG-SUMMONED DEMON HAS YET TO STEP THROUGH THE PORTAL, PIPER--
--AND HE SHALL NOT, SO LONG AS ROM DOES LIVE!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER SHREDS WRAITH MAGIC...
SHREEE
EEEEEEEEEE
...AND THE MORBID MUSICIAN, AS WELL!
ANOTHER PORTAL OPENS FOR THE PERILOUS PIPER!
THE DOOR-WAY TO LIMBO!
ZOOOO
21
THE PIPER IS BANISHED! HE CAN WREAK NO FURTHER EVIL!
BUT THE GREAT DANGER IS STILL TO BE DEALT WITH!
BACK, YE HARBINGER OF HORROR! BACK YE DEMON OF DARKNESS!

YOU SHALL NOT STEP ACROSS THE DOORWAY BETWEEN DIMENSIONS! YOU SHALL NOT POLLUTE THIS PLANET OR IT'S PEOPLE!
SO SWEARS ROM --PROTECTOR OF THIS PLANET!
THOSE ARE THE LAST WORDS THE SILVER CYBORG UTTERS ON OUR EARTHLY PLANE.
LOCKED IN A DEATH-GRIP WITH THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD, HE CARRIES THE FIGHT INTO SOME REALM BEYOND OUR OWN.
THE PORTAL CLOSES. THE LIGHT THAT BETOKENED ITS COMING WITHDRAWS INTO THE NIGHT.
THE CHILDREN AWAKE--SAFE--FROM THEIR SLEEP, AND MAKE THEIR WAY HOME.
ROM, HOWEVER, IS GONE.
22
NEXT:
DUEL IN A DERANGED DIMENSION!
GUEST-STARRING... DR. STRANGE!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MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
ROM™
AND DOCTOR STRANGE CONFRONT: THE LIVING TRIBUNAL!
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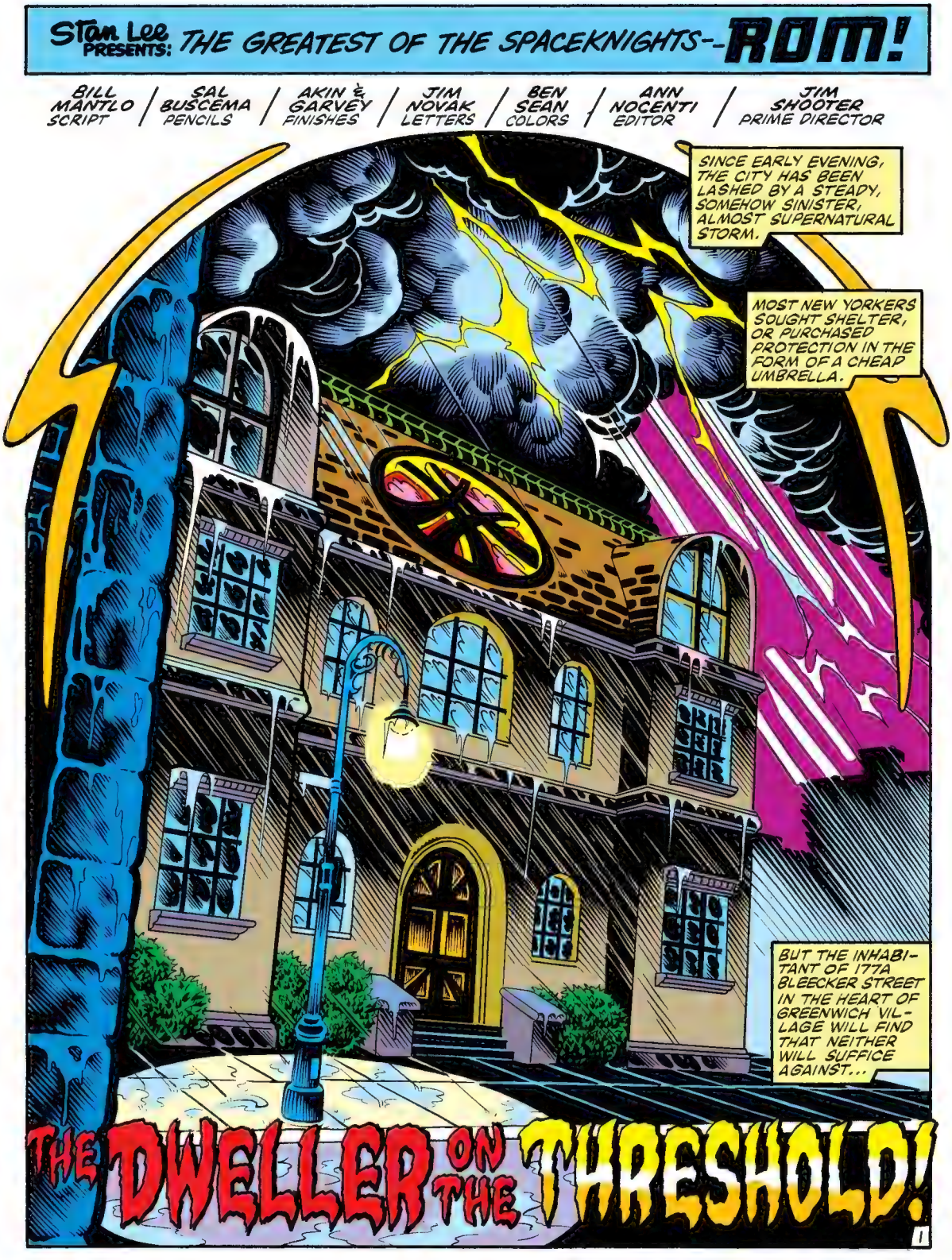
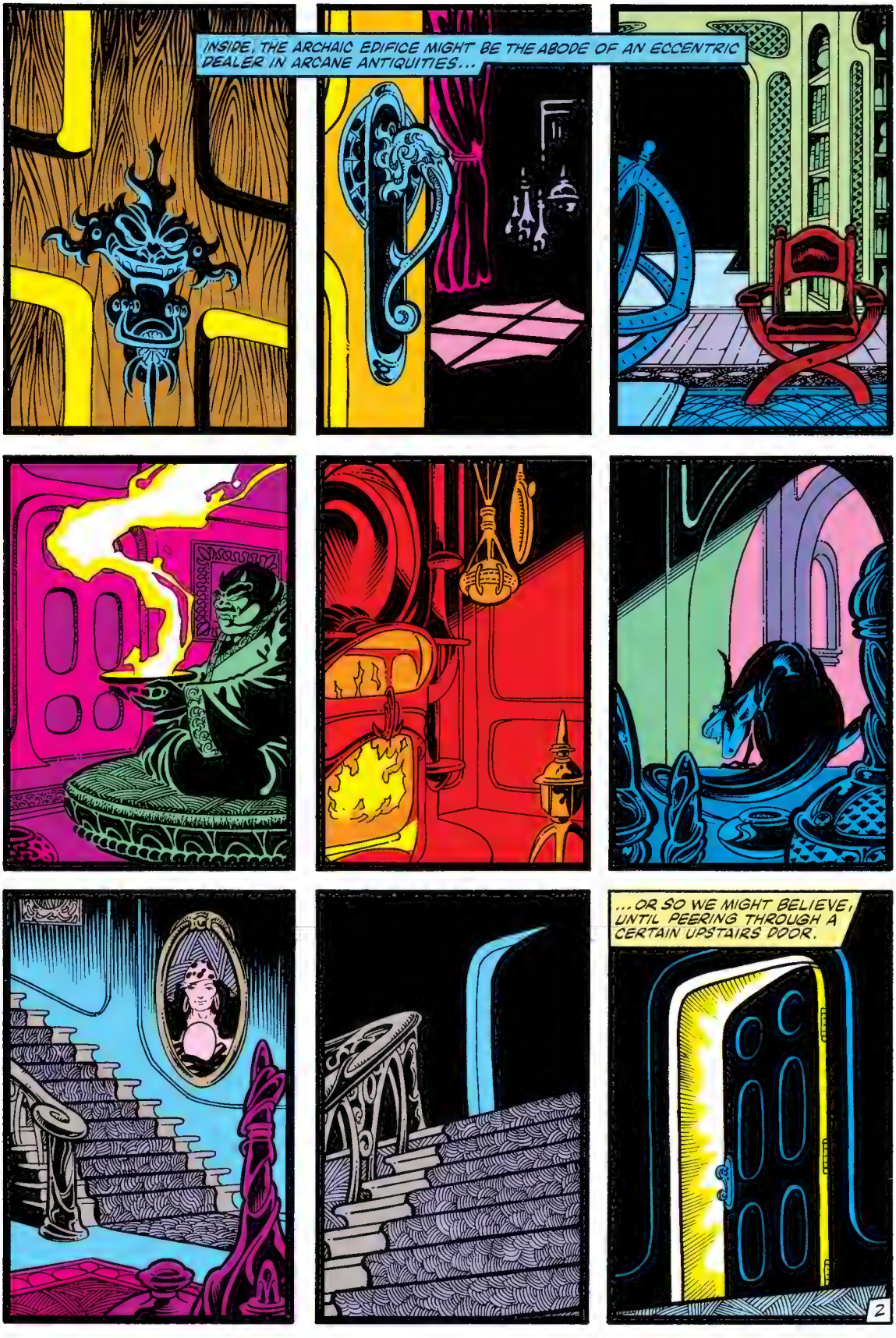
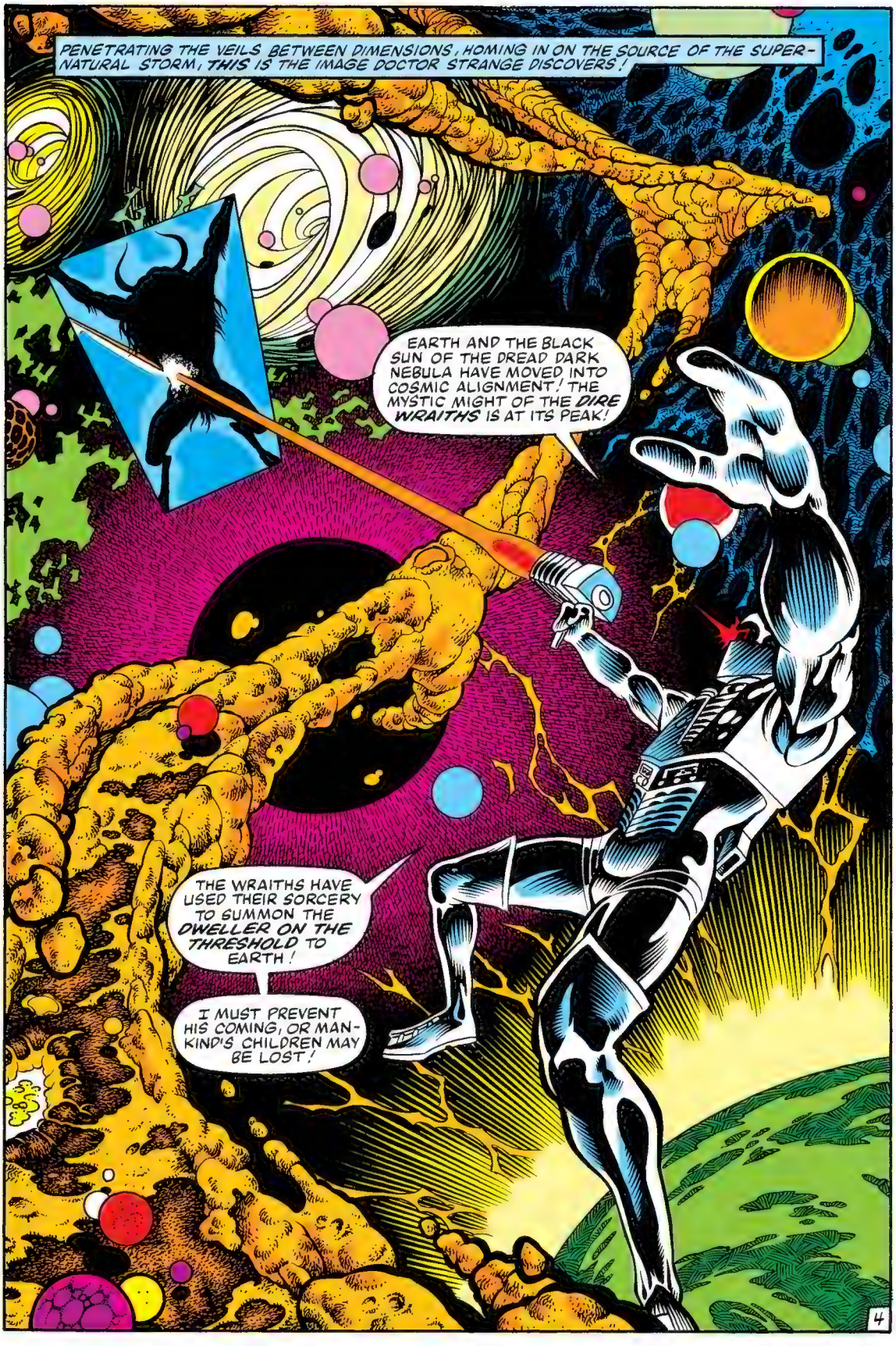

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPT / SAL BUSCEMA PENCILS / AKIN & GARVEY FINISHES / JIM NOVAK LETTERS / BEN SEAN COLORS / ANN NOCENTI EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
SINCE EARLY EVENING, THE CITY HAS BEEN LASHED BY A STEADY, SOMEHOW SINISTER, ALMOST SUPERNATURAL STORM.
MOST NEW YORKERS SOUGHT SHELTER, OR PURCHASED PROTECTION IN THE FORM OF A CHEAP UMBRELLA.
BUT THE INHABITANT OF 177A BLEECKER STREET IN THE HEART OF GREENWICH VILLAGE WILL FIND THAT NEITHER WILL SUFFICE AGAINST...
THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD!
1


INSIDE, THE ARCHAIC EDIFICE MIGHT BE THE ABODE OF AN ECCENTRIC DEALER IN ARCANE ANTIQUITIES...
...OR SO WE MIGHT BELIEVE, UNTIL PEERING THROUGH A CERTAIN UPSTAIRS DOOR.
2

IN THIS CHAMBER--THIS SANCTUM SANCTORUM --MAGIC IS PRACTICED MUCH LIKE A MUSICIAN PRACTICES HIS SCALES.
SPELLS ARE FORMED AND FLOATED UPON THE ETHER MUCH AS THEIR MAKER FLOATS ABOVE THE FLOOR.
SOON, THEY WEAVE EVEN GREATER SPELLS, SYMPHONIES OF SORCERY THAT CASCADE AND CRASH ABOUT THE CHAMBER.
AND THEIR COMPOSER IS DOCTOR STRANGE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!
TONIGHT, HE HAS FOUND HIS MEDITATION DISTURBED:
TROUBLED IN MIND AND SPIRIT, DR. STRANGE SEARCHES FOR THE CAUSE OF THE DISTURBANCE BY SUMMONING FORTH HIS ALL-SEEING EYE OF AGAMOTTO...
...AND TRAINING IT ON YET ANOTHER POWER OBJECT, HIS CRYSTAL ORB.
3

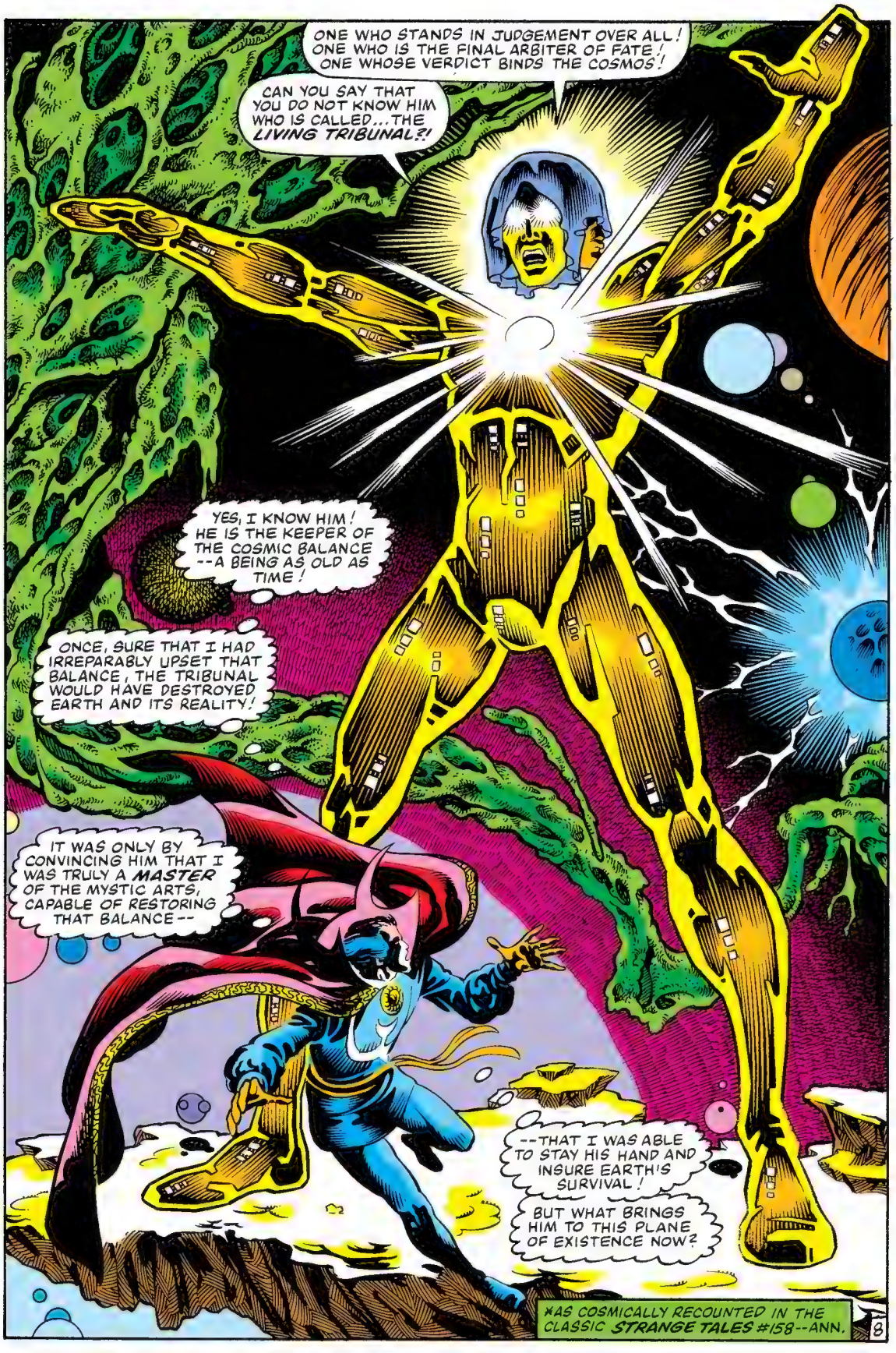

PENETRATING THE VEILS BETWEEN DIMENSIONS, HOMING IN ON THE SOURCE OF THE SUPER-NATURAL STORM, THIS IS THE IMAGE DOCTOR STRANGE DISCOVERS!
EARTH AND THE BLACK SUN OF THE DREAD DARK NEBULA HAVE MOVED INTO COSMIC ALIGNMENT! THE MYSTIC MIGHT OF THE DIRE WRAITHS IS AT ITS PEAK!
THE WRAITHS HAVE USED THEIR SORCERY TO SUMMON THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD TO EARTH!
I MUST PREVENT HIS COMING, OR MANKIND'S CHILDREN MAY BE LOST!
4

PROBING DEEPER, THE MYSTIC MAGE LEARNS THAT EARTH'S SELF-SWORN SILVER DEFENDER IS A BEING FROM ANOTHER WORLD... A CYBORG--PART MAN AND PART MACHINE--NAMED **ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!** IN SHOCK, STRANGE REALIZES THAT ROM HAS COME HITHER ON A CRUSADE TO CLEANSE EARTH OF A GREAT AND HIDDEN EVIL...

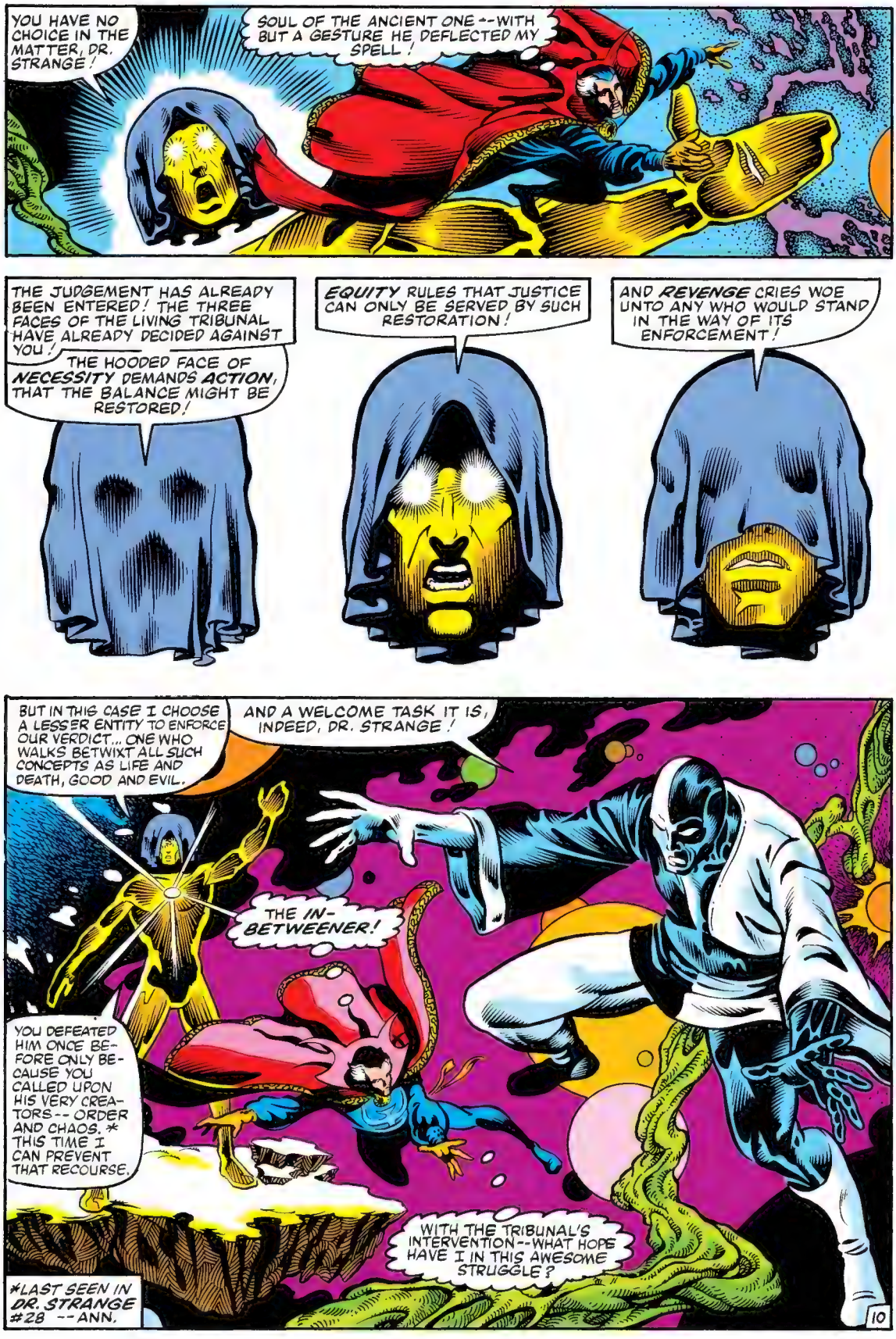
...SO WELL HIDDEN, IN FACT, THAT DR. STRANGE HIMSELF WAS UNAWARE OF IT! THE DIRE WRAITHS WANT EARTH'S CHILDREN FOR SOME OBSCENE, ABHORRENT BREEDING PURPOSE! THE COSMIC ALIGNMENT WAS TO SIGNAL THE SUMMONING OF THE **DWELLER** TO EARTH THAT HE MIGHT BEGIN THE GENETIC EXPERIMENT! ROM FORESTALLED IT BY BANISHING THE WRAITH PIPER OF PERIL!

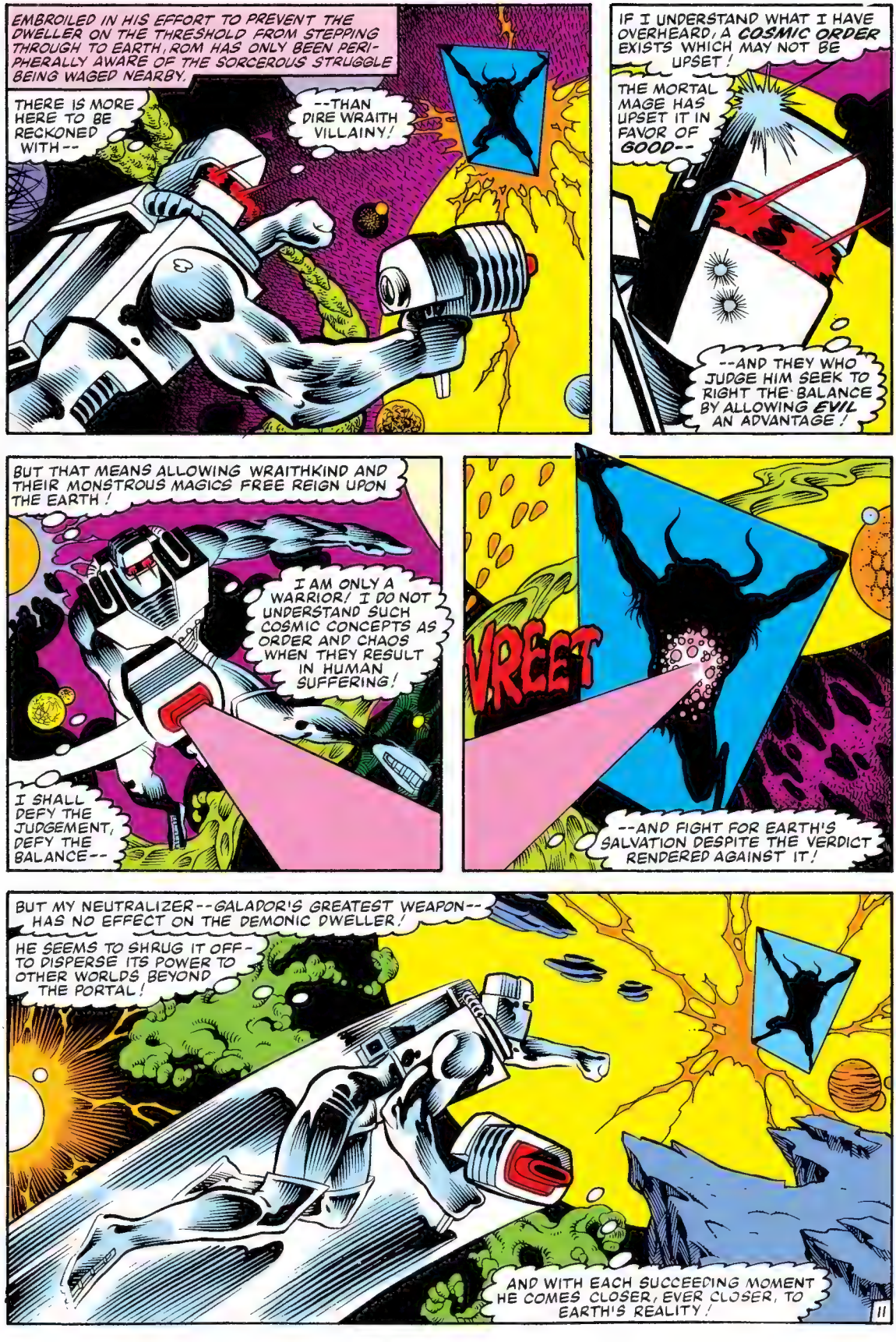
BUT, THOUGH THE PIPER WAS BANISHED, THE PORTAL HIS PIPES OPENED REMAINED OPEN!
THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD DREW NEAR! HAD HE STEPPED THROUGH, EARTH'S CHILDREN MIGHT HAVE BEEN LOST!
TO PREVENT HIS ARRIVAL, ROM LEAPT THROUGH THE PORTAL-- SACRIFICING HIMSELF TO SAVE AN ALIEN WORLD!
MY WORLD! I HAVE SEEN ENOUGH!
A BATTLE RAGES, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TIME AND SPACE!
'TIS A BATTLE FOUGHT FOR THE SALVATION OF EARTH--
--WAGED BY A MAN OF ANOTHER WORLD AGAINST AN UNHOLY HARBINGER OF HORROR!
IT IS NOT THE WAY OF DOCTOR STRANGE TO REMAIN NEUTRAL DURING SUCH A CLASH!
THUS, CROSS THE DIMENSIONS I MUST TRAVEL-- LEST THE FLOWER OF EARTH'S YOUTH SHOULD PERISH!
6

A SIMPLE SPELL...
...AND DR. STRANGE IS GONE FROM HIS STUDY CHAMBER INTO A REALM OF UNREALITY!
THERE HE FINDS HE IS NOT ALONE!
GET THEE BACK, FOUL SPAWN OF DARKNESS!
VREET
'TIS THE SPACEKNIGHT--ROM! THEN STILL HE STANDS!
BUT HIS WEAPON--HIS NEUTRALIZER--HAS NO EFFECT ON THE DWELLER IN THE THRESHOLD!
THE SUPERNATURALLY SUMMONED HORROR COMES EVER NEARER TO THE MOMENT WHEN HE CAN STEP THROUGH THIS DIMENSION TO EARTH!
I MUST ADD MY SORCERY TO THE SPACEKNIGHT'S SCIENCE, AND PREVENT--
HOLD, DR. STRANGE! CAST NOT YOUR SPELL!
EH? WHO COMMANDS THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS??!
7

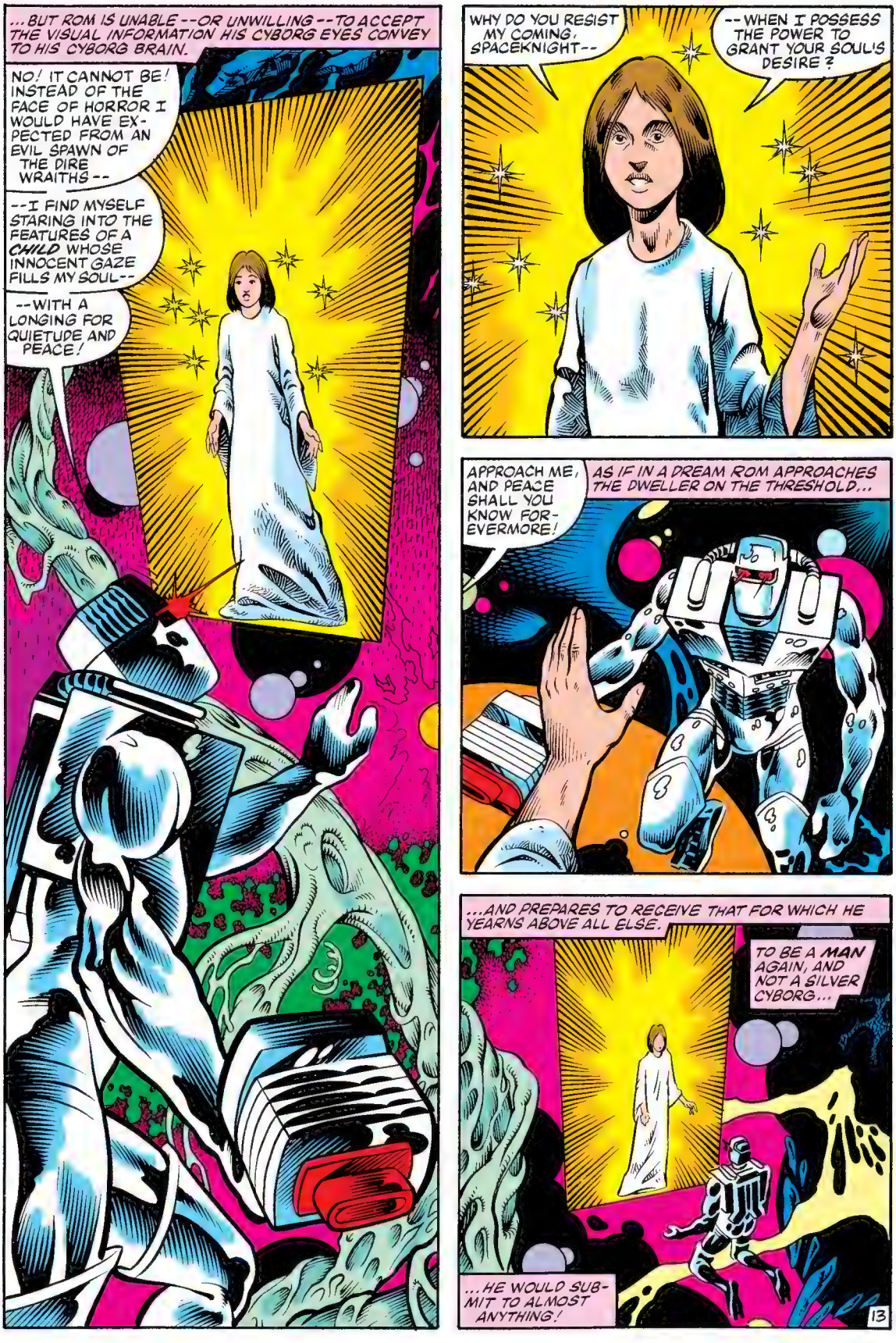

ONE WHO STANDS IN JUDGEMENT OVER ALL! ONE WHO IS THE FINAL ARBITER OF FATE! ONE WHOSE VERDICT BINDS THE COSMOS!
CAN YOU SAY THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW HIM WHO IS CALLED...THE LIVING TRIBUNAL?!
YES, I KNOW HIM! HE IS THE KEEPER OF THE COSMIC BALANCE --A BEING AS OLD AS TIME!
ONCE, SURE THAT I HAD IRREPARABLY UPSET THAT BALANCE, THE TRIBUNAL WOULD HAVE DESTROYED EARTH AND ITS REALITY!
IT WAS ONLY BY CONVINCING HIM THAT I WAS TRULY A MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, CAPABLE OF RESTORING THAT BALANCE--
--THAT I WAS ABLE TO STAY HIS HAND AND INSURE EARTH'S SURVIVAL!
BUT WHAT BRINGS HIM TO THIS PLANE OF EXISTENCE NOW?
*AS COSMICALLY RECOUNTED IN THE CLASSIC STRANGE TALES #158--ANN.
8

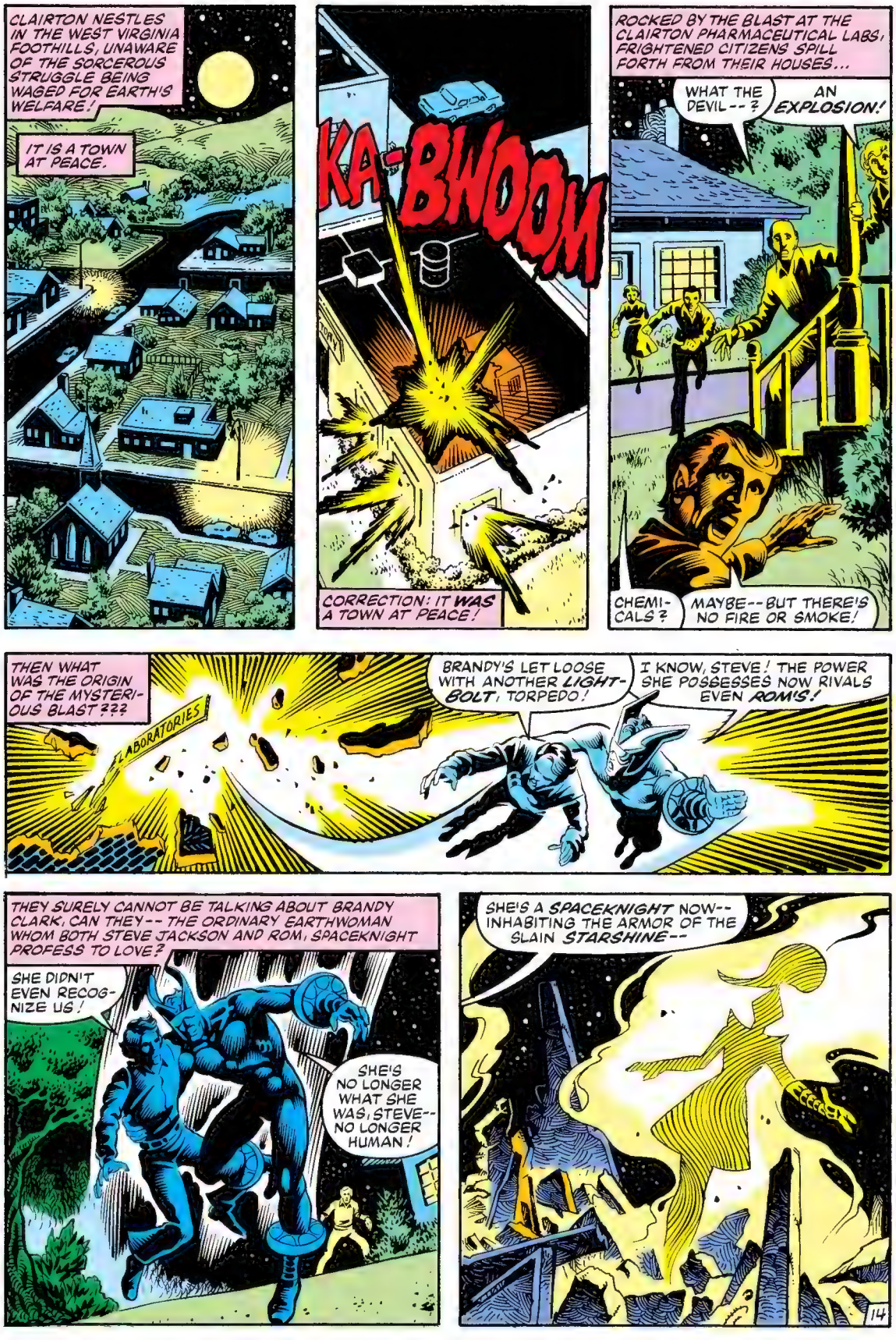
I AM NOT A JUDGE OF GOOD OR EVIL, MORTAL! THOSE CONCEPTS ARE FOR LESSER BEINGS!
MY DUTY IS TO PRESERVE THE BALANCE OF ALL FORCES IN THE MULTIVERSE--INCLUDING SORCERY.
BUT THERE IS BOTH GOOD MAGIC AND EVIL MAGIC, TRIBUNAL!
WHITE MAGIC AND BLACK!
I DO NOT DENY THAT, DR. STRANGE! RATHER, I EXIST TO MAINTAIN THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO!
YOU SWORE TO UPHOLD THAT BALANCE ALSO, WHEN LAST WE MET!
YOU HAVE FAILED!
FAILED? HOW?
YOUR OWN MASTERY OF THE MYSTIC ARTS WAS YOUR UNDOING!
BECAUSE YOU EXIST, BLACK MAGIC ON EARTH IS ON THE WANE!
I REJOICE TO HEAR IT!
DO YOU STILL NOT UNDERSTAND ME? I CARE NOTHING FOR GOOD OR EVIL! I ONLY SUPPORT THE BALANCE!
AND I HAVE TILTED THE BALANCE IN FAVOR OF GOOD?
HEAR ME, TRIBUNAL! YOU SPEAK IN ABSTRACTS--IN CONCEPTS CALLED ORDER AND BALANCE AND CHAOS!
I DO NOT DEVOTE MY MYSTIC ENERGY TO CONCEPTS PER SE--
--BUT TO PROTECTING THE WELFARE OF COUNTLESS INNOCENT LIVING BEINGS WHO EXIST UNAWARE OF SUCH CONCEPTS AT ALL!
IF INSURING THEIR HAPPINESS MEANS TIPPING THE BALANCE IN FAVOR OF GOOD--
--THEN I SAY LET THE BALANCE BE UPSET!
I'LL NOT LET THE DWELLER AND HIS EVIL REACH EARTH MERELY TO RESTORE A CONCEPT, NO MATTER HOW MEANINGFUL!
9


YOU HAVE NO CHOICE IN THE MATTER, DR. STRANGE!
SOUL OF THE ANCIENT ONE--WITH BUT A GESTURE HE DEFLECTED MY SPELL!
THE JUDGEMENT HAS ALREADY BEEN ENTERED! THE THREE FACES OF THE LIVING TRIBUNAL HAVE ALREADY DECIDED AGAINST YOU!
THE HOODED FACE OF NECESSITY DEMANDS ACTION, THAT THE BALANCE MIGHT BE RESTORED!
EQUITY RULES THAT JUSTICE CAN ONLY BE SERVED BY SUCH RESTORATION!
AND REVENGE CRIES WOE UNTO ANY WHO WOULD STAND IN THE WAY OF ITS ENFORCEMENT!
BUT IN THIS CASE I CHOOSE A LESSER ENTITY TO ENFORCE OUR VERDICT... ONE WHO WALKS BETWIXT ALL SUCH CONCEPTS AS LIFE AND DEATH, GOOD AND EVIL.
AND A WELCOME TASK IT IS, INDEED, DR. STRANGE!
THE IN-BETWEENER!
YOU DEFEATED HIM ONCE BEFORE ONLY BECAUSE YOU CALLED UPON HIS VERY CREATORS--ORDER AND CHAOS.* THIS TIME I CAN PREVENT THAT RECOURSE.
WITH THE TRIBUNAL'S INTERVENTION--WHAT HOPE HAVE I IN THIS AWESOME STRUGGLE?
*LAST SEEN IN DR. STRANGE #28 --ANN.
10


EMBROILED IN HIS EFFORT TO PREVENT THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD FROM STEPPING THROUGH TO EARTH, ROM HAS ONLY BEEN PERIPHERALLY AWARE OF THE SORCEROUS STRUGGLE BEING WAGED NEARBY.
THERE IS MORE HERE TO BE RECKONED WITH--
--THAN DIRE WRAITH VILLAINY!
IF I UNDERSTAND WHAT I HAVE OVERHEARD, A COSMIC ORDER EXISTS WHICH MAY NOT BE UPSET!
THE MORTAL MAGE HAS UPSET IT IN FAVOR OF GOOD--
--AND THEY WHO JUDGE HIM SEEK TO RIGHT THE BALANCE BY ALLOWING EVIL AN ADVANTAGE!
BUT THAT MEANS ALLOWING WRAITHKIND AND THEIR MONSTROUS MAGICS FREE REIGN UPON THE EARTH!
I AM ONLY A WARRIOR! I DO NOT UNDERSTAND SUCH COSMIC CONCEPTS AS ORDER AND CHAOS WHEN THEY RESULT IN HUMAN SUFFERING!
I SHALL DEFY THE JUDGEMENT, DEFY THE BALANCE--
VREET
--AND FIGHT FOR EARTH'S SALVATION DESPITE THE VERDICT RENDERED AGAINST IT!
BUT MY NEUTRALIZER--GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON--HAS NO EFFECT ON THE DEMONIC DWELLER!
HE SEEMS TO SHRUG IT OFF--TO DISPERSE ITS POWER TO OTHER WORLDS BEYOND THE PORTAL!
AND WITH EACH SUCCEEDING MOMENT HE COMES CLOSER, EVER CLOSER, TO EARTH'S REALITY!
11

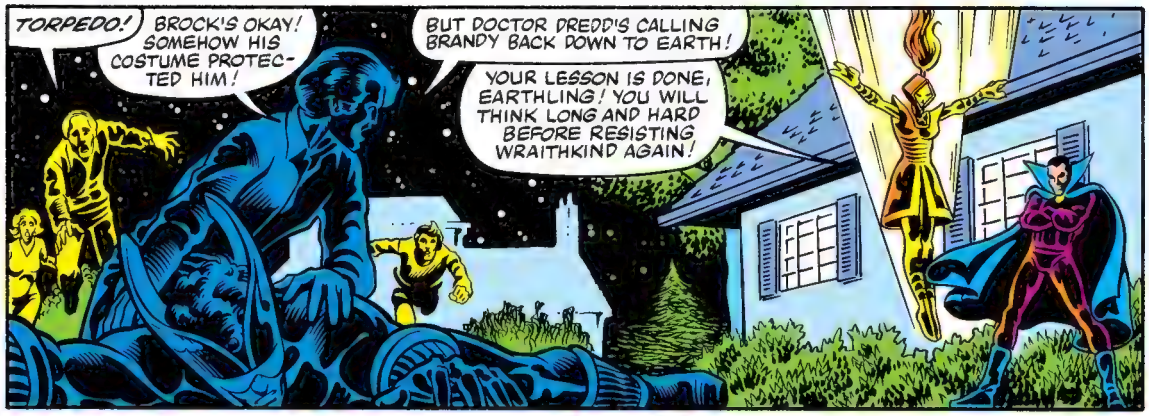
THOUGH INCALCULABLY DISTANT, THE DWELLER REACHES OUT ACROSS THE DIMENSIONAL VOID, AND HIS POWER TOUCHES THE SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT!
REALITY SHIFTS ABOUT ME!
MY CYBORG CIRCUITRY CANNOT COMPENSATE FOR THIS SUDDEN ALTERING OF PARAMETERS!
THEY REVOLT, OVERLOADING--
--AND I FEEL MYSELF BEING DRIVEN INSANE!
THIS IS THE DWELLER'S DOING!
HE, AT LEAST, IS REAL IN ALL OF THIS!
IF I AM TO REGAIN SOME GRIP ON MY SANITY I MUST APPROACH HIM, CONFRONT HIM--
--AND GAZE FULL UPON HIS FACE!
CRIMSON EYES FOCUS ON THE DWELLER'S VISAGE...
12

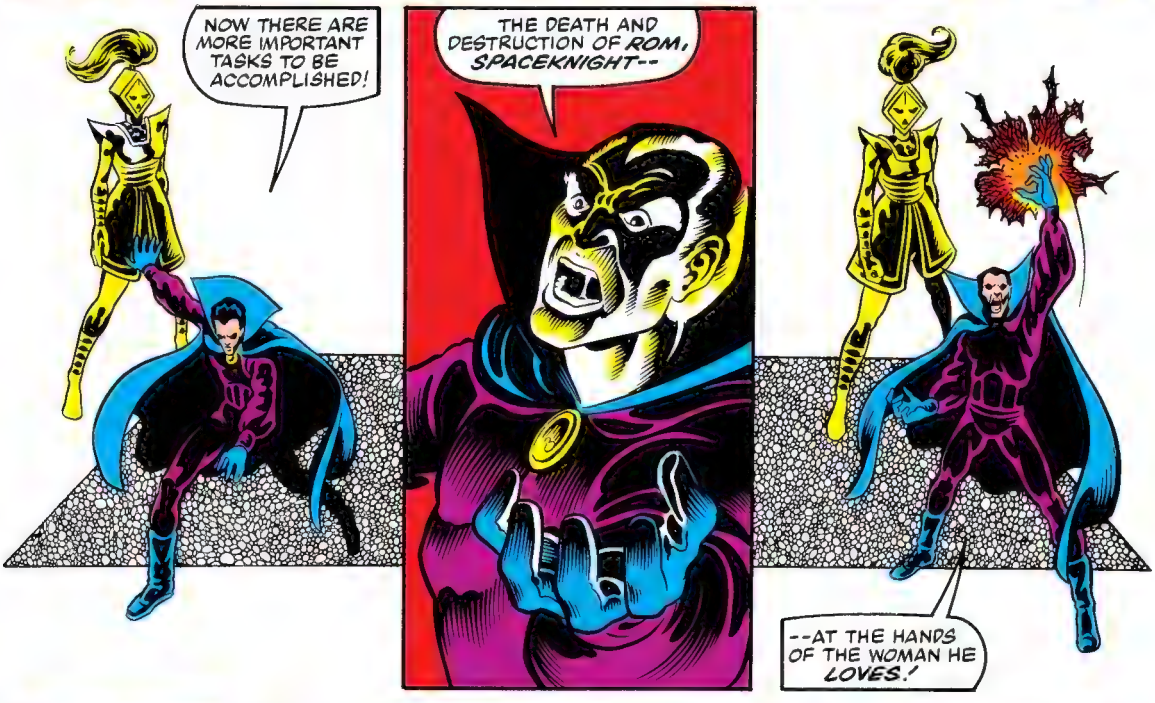

...BUT ROM IS UNABLE--OR UNWILLING--TO ACCEPT THE VISUAL INFORMATION HIS CYBORG EYES CONVEY TO HIS CYBORG BRAIN.
NO! IT CANNOT BE! INSTEAD OF THE FACE OF HORROR I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED FROM AN EVIL SPAWN OF THE DIRE WRAITHS--
--I FIND MYSELF STARING INTO THE FEATURES OF A CHILD WHOSE INNOCENT GAZE FILLS MY SOUL--
--WITH A LONGING FOR QUIETUDE AND PEACE!
WHY DO YOU RESIST MY COMING, SPACEKNIGHT--
--WHEN I POSSESS THE POWER TO GRANT YOUR SOUL'S DESIRE?
APPROACH ME, AND PEACE SHALL YOU KNOW FOREVERMORE!
AS IF IN A DREAM ROM APPROACHES THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD...
...AND PREPARES TO RECEIVE THAT FOR WHICH HE YEARNS ABOVE ALL ELSE.
TO BE A MAN AGAIN, AND NOT A SILVER CYBORG...
...HE WOULD SUBMIT TO ALMOST ANYTHING!
13

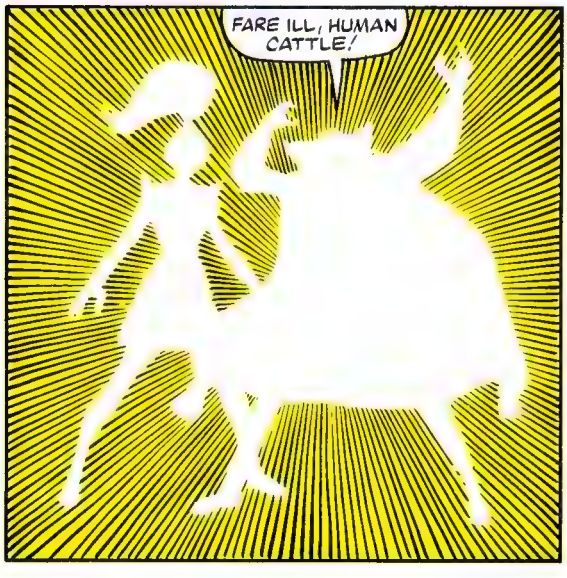

CLAIRTON NESTLES IN THE WEST VIRGINIA FOOTHILLS, UNAWARE OF THE SORCEROUS STRUGGLE BEING WAGED FOR EARTH'S WELFARE!
IT IS A TOWN AT PEACE.
KA-BWOOM
CORRECTION: IT WAS A TOWN AT PEACE!
ROCKED BY THE BLAST AT THE CLAIRTON PHARMACEUTICAL LABS, FRIGHTENED CITIZENS SPILL FORTH FROM THEIR HOUSES...
WHAT THE DEVIL--?
AN EXPLOSION!
CHEMICALS?
MAYBE--BUT THERE'S NO FIRE OR SMOKE!
THEN WHAT WAS THE ORIGIN OF THE MYSTERIOUS BLAST???
LABORATORIES
BRANDY'S LET LOOSE WITH ANOTHER LIGHT-BOLT, TORPEDO!
I KNOW, STEVE! THE POWER SHE POSSESSES NOW RIVALS EVEN ROM'S!
THEY SURELY CANNOT BE TALKING ABOUT BRANDY CLARK, CAN THEY-- THE ORDINARY EARTHWOMAN WHOM BOTH STEVE JACKSON AND ROM, SPACEKNIGHT PROFESS TO LOVE?
SHE DIDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE US!
SHE'S NO LONGER WHAT SHE WAS, STEVE--NO LONGER HUMAN!
SHE'S A SPACEKNIGHT NOW--INHABITING THE ARMOR OF THE SLAIN STARSHINE--
14

--AND SHE'S TOTALLY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE DIRE WRAITH WARLOCK... DOCTOR DREDD!
THAT IS CORRECT, TORPEDO!
THE WOMAN CALLED BRANDY CLARK IS AN EMISSARY OF WRAITHKIND NOW!
MADE STRONG BY HER OWN DESIRE TO GIVE UP HER HUMANITY AND JOIN ROM... AND BY A BIT OF DIRE WRAITH MAGIC!
JOIN THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT SHE WILL--NOT TO LOVE, BUT TO KILL HIM!
BUT, FIRST, SHE WILL DEAL WITH YOUR PUNY HAMLET, WREAKING DESTRUCTION ON CLAIRTON FOR DARING TO RESIST US DIRE WRAITHS!
GO, STARSHINE! BRING THE STARS DOWN FROM THE SKIES!
YES!
THE GOLDEN GLADIATRIX SOARS FORTH, UNTIL SHE IS HIGH ABOVE THE TOWN.
THEN SHE TURNS HER BLAZING GAZE DOWNWARD...
...AND THE NIGHT EXPLODES IN STARLIGHT!
IT'S STARSHINE! SHE'S ALIVE!
BUT SHE BEFRIENDED US! SHE WAS AN ALLY!
WHY IS SHE ATTACKING US NOW?!?
15

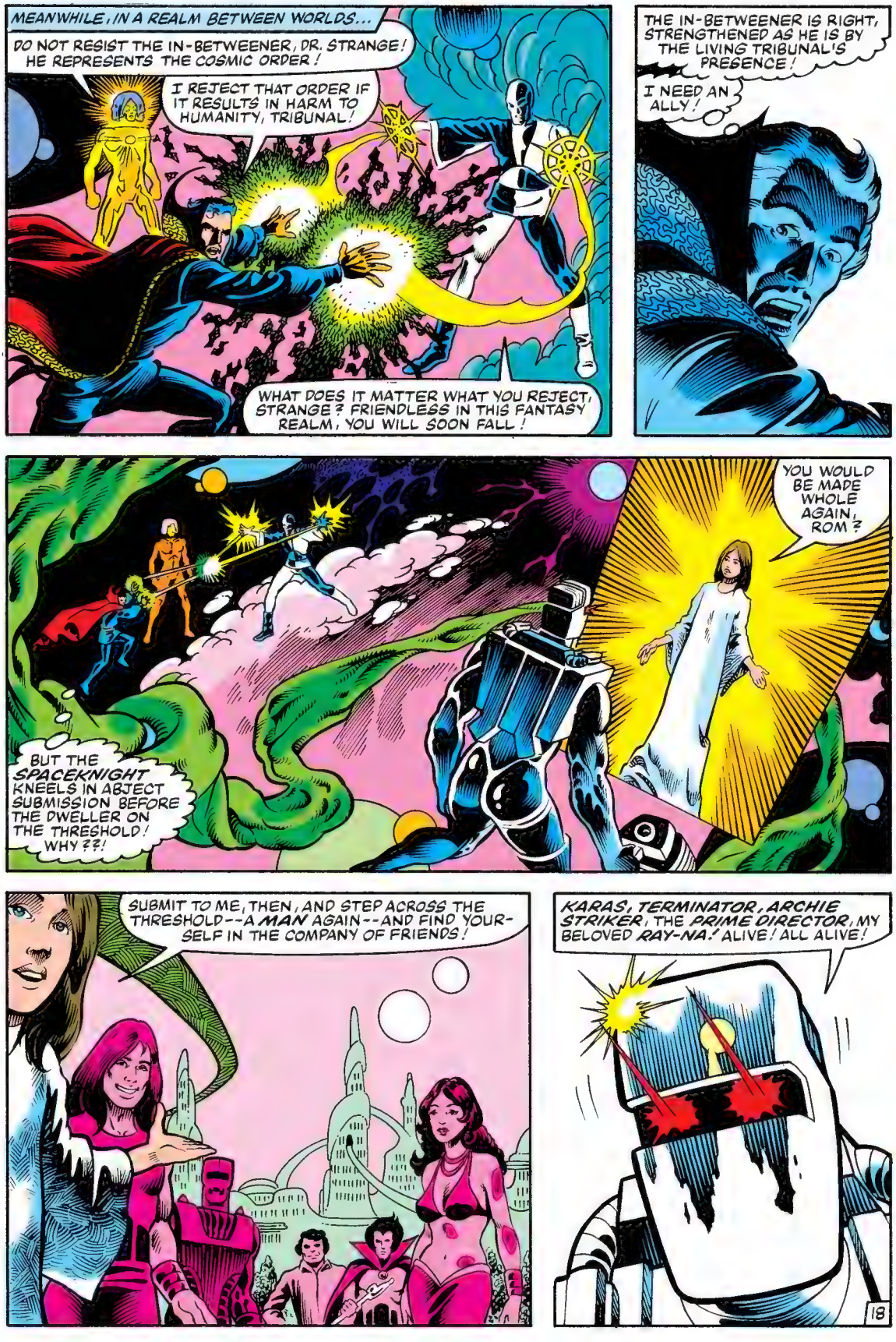
TWO THERE ARE WHO KNOW THE ANSWER, BUT THEY'RE TOO BUSY NOW TO SPREAD THE NEWS!
STAY HERE, STEVE! I'M GOING TO DEAL WITH STARSHINE!
WAIT, TORPEDO! WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "DEAL WITH" HER?
THAT'S NOT STARSHINE UP THERE! IT'S BRANDY --MY BRANDY-- THE WOMAN I LOVE!
BUT SHE LOVES ROM--AND DREDD USED THAT LOVE TO MAKE HER INTO A RENEGADE SPACEKNIGHT!
I KNOW WHAT STEVE'S FEELING-- BUT I'VE GOT A TOWN TO PROTECT!
SOME GUARDIAN I AM! IF I'D BEEN ON MY TOES--
--THE WRAITHS WOULD NEVER HAVE REINFILTRATED CLAIRTON IN THE FIRST PLACE!
BETTER GET READY! HERE COMES STARSHINE!
THE COSTUME THE TORPEDO WEARS POSSESSES INCREDIBLE POWER.
THE POWER AVAILS HIM NOTHING AGAINST THE LIGHT-EYES VISION OF STAR-SHINE!
YEEARGGH!
NUMB ALL OVER! CAN'T CONTROL MY FLIGHT!
I'M FALLING!
AND, FROM THIS HEIGHT, EVEN THE TORPEDO CAN DIE...!!!
KRUMP!
16

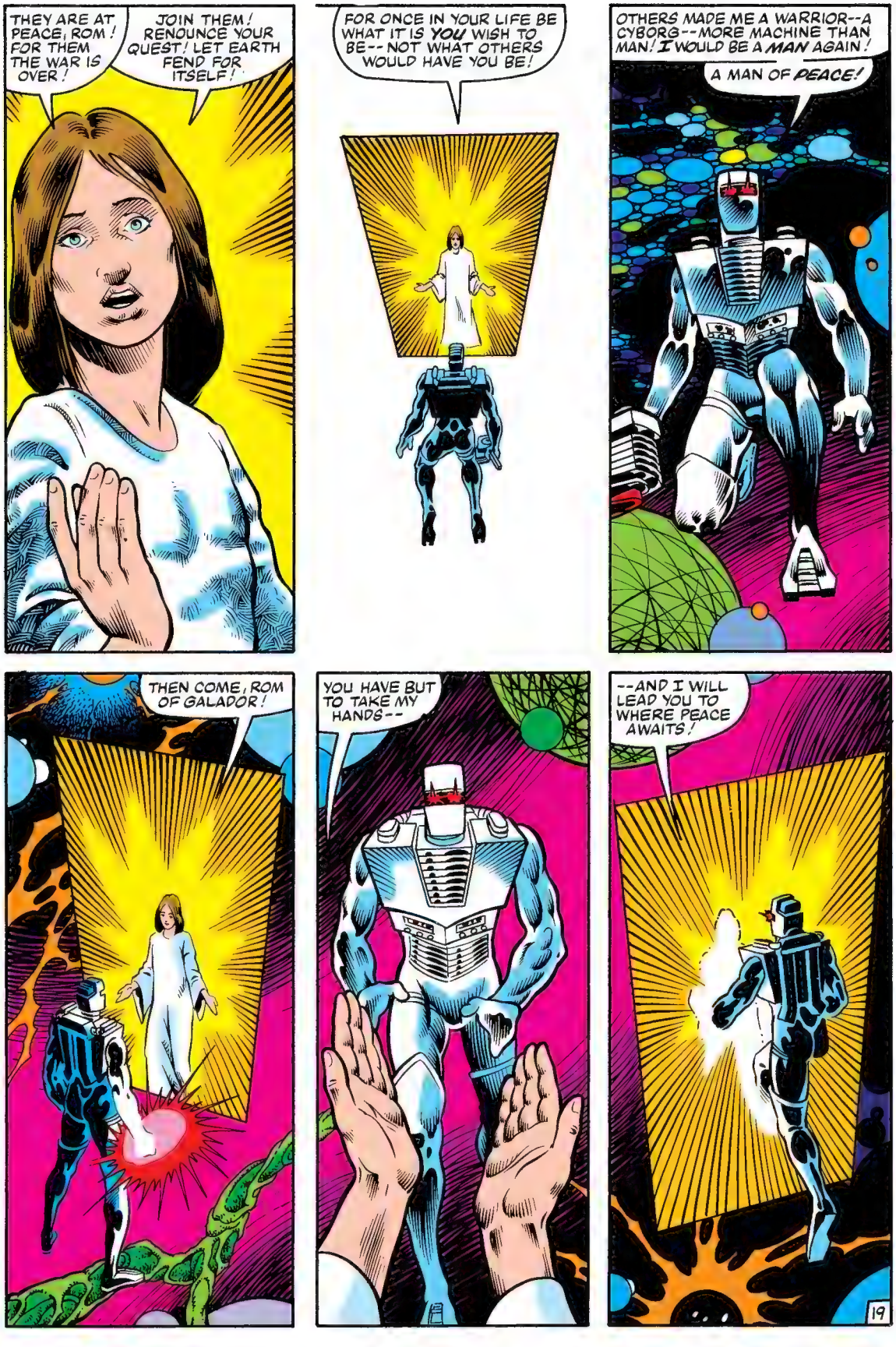

TORPEDO!
BROCK'S OKAY! SOMEHOW HIS COSTUME PROTECTED HIM!
BUT DOCTOR DREDD'S CALLING BRANDY BACK DOWN TO EARTH!
YOUR LESSON IS DONE, EARTHLING! YOU WILL THINK LONG AND HARD BEFORE RESISTING WRAITHKIND AGAIN!


NOW THERE ARE MORE IMPORTANT TASKS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED!
THE DEATH AND DESTRUCTION OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT--
--AT THE HANDS OF THE WOMAN HE LOVES!


FARE ILL, HUMAN CATTLE!

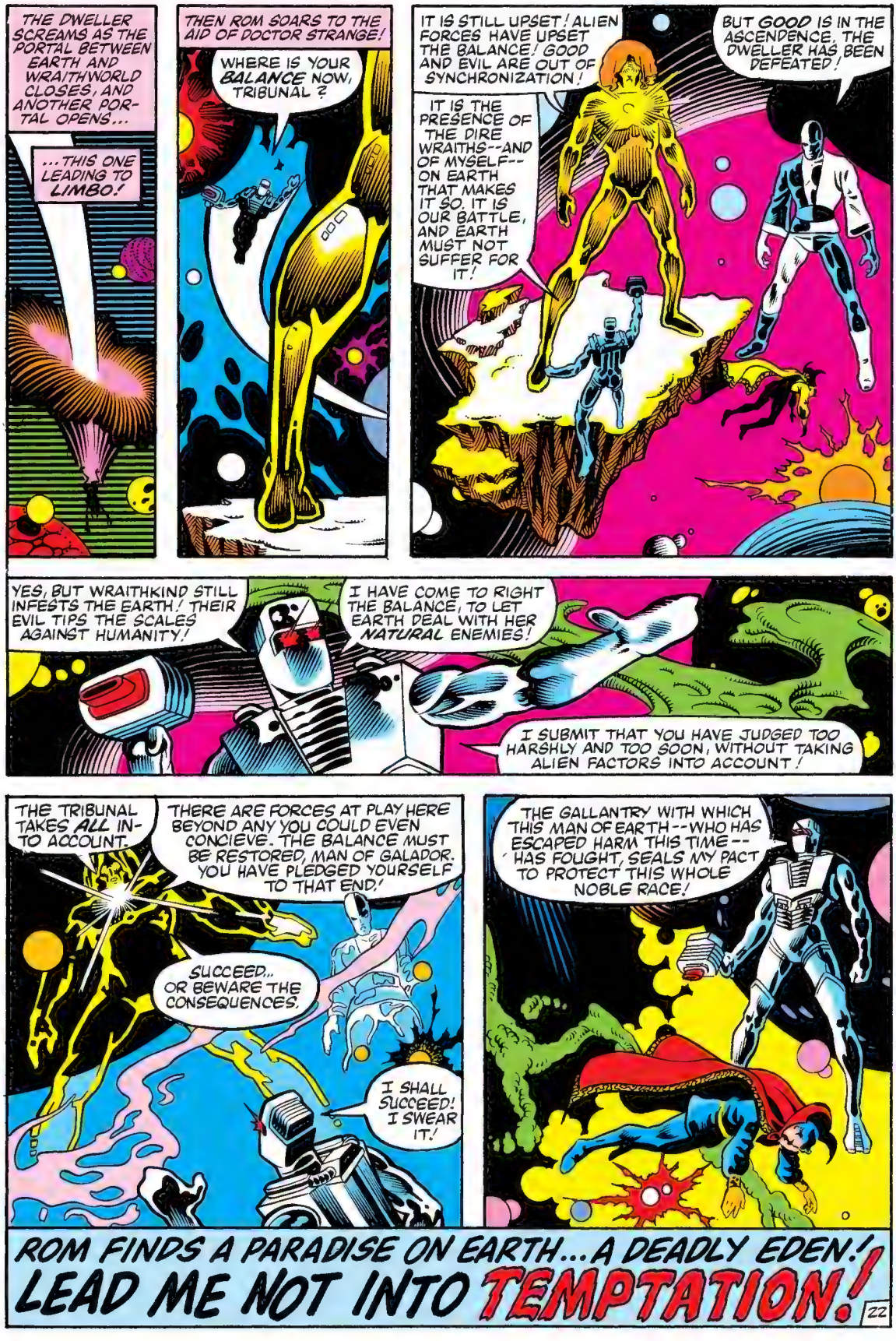
WH-WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
STEVE JACKSON CANNOT EVEN BEGIN TO EXPLAIN.
17

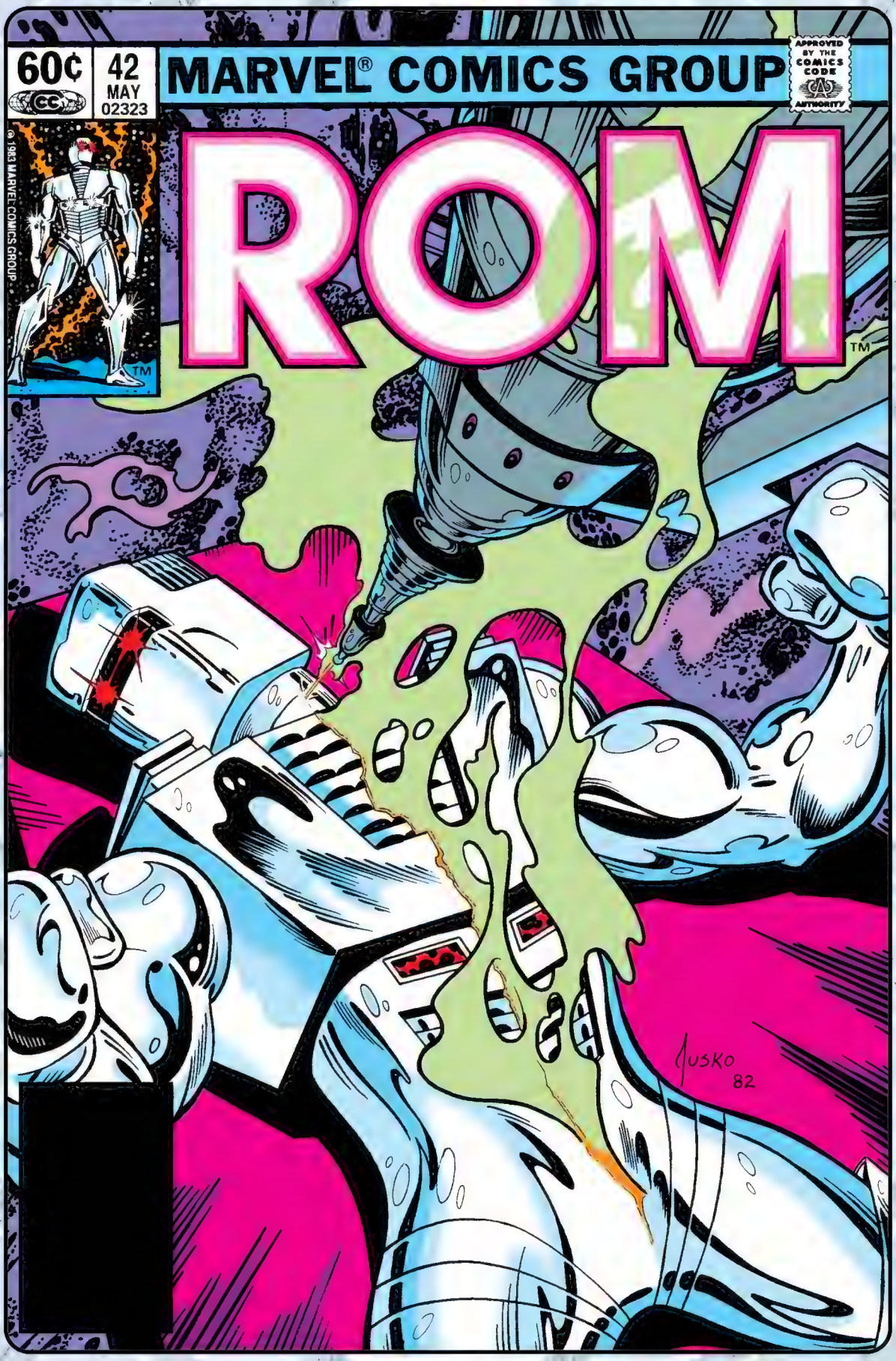

MEANWHILE, IN A REALM BETWEEN WORLDS...
DO NOT RESIST THE IN-BETWEENER, DR. STRANGE! HE REPRESENTS THE COSMIC ORDER!
I REJECT THAT ORDER IF IT RESULTS IN HARM TO HUMANITY, TRIBUNAL!
WHAT DOES IT MATTER WHAT YOU REJECT, STRANGE? FRIENDLESS IN THIS FANTASY REALM, YOU WILL SOON FALL!
THE IN-BETWEENER IS RIGHT, STRENGTHENED AS HE IS BY THE LIVING TRIBUNAL'S PRESENCE!
I NEED AN ALLY!
YOU WOULD BE MADE WHOLE AGAIN, ROM?
BUT THE SPACEKNIGHT KNEELS IN ABJECT SUBMISSION BEFORE THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD! WHY??!
SUBMIT TO ME, THEN, AND STEP ACROSS THE THRESHOLD--A MAN AGAIN--AND FIND YOURSELF IN THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS!
KARAS, TERMINATOR, ARCHIE STRIKER, THE PRIME DIRECTOR, MY BELOVED RAY-NA! ALIVE! ALL ALIVE!
18


THEY ARE AT PEACE, ROM! FOR THEM THE WAR IS OVER!
JOIN THEM! RENOUNCE YOUR QUEST! LET EARTH FEND FOR ITSELF!
FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE BE WHAT IT IS YOU WISH TO BE-- NOT WHAT OTHERS WOULD HAVE YOU BE!
OTHERS MADE ME A WARRIOR--A CYBORG--MORE MACHINE THAN MAN! I WOULD BE A MAN AGAIN!
A MAN OF PEACE!
THEN COME, ROM OF GALADOR!
YOU HAVE BUT TO TAKE MY HANDS--
--AND I WILL LEAD YOU TO WHERE PEACE AWAITS!
19

YOUR ALLY HAS SUBMITTED TO THE BALANCE, STRANGE! YOU CARRY ON YOUR RESISTANCE ALONE!
NO! I SEE THAT ROM IS BEING MYSTICALLY LED INTO TEMPTATION!
IF HE INDEED NOW PURSUES HIS DREAM THROUGH THE DIMENSIONAL PORTAL--
--I FEAR HIS WILL BE A CRUEL AWAKENING!
YET AWAKEN HIM I MUST! HE FOUGHT FOR EARTH!
EARTH MUST NOW IN TURN FIGHT FOR HIM!
THOUGH IT OPENS ME TO ASSAULT BY THE IN-BETWEENER--
--SAVING THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT IS MY DUTY, AND I WILL NOT SHIRK IT!
YOUR INSIPID ADHERANCE TO DUTY WAS EVER YOUR DOWNFALL, DR. STRANGE!
AGGGHHH!
THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS IS ENGULFED IN ETHEREAL ENCHANTMENTS...
...BUT NOT BEFORE HIS SPELL OF AWAKENING REACHES OUT AND TOUCHES ROM!
EH? IT IS AS IF SOMEONE HAD LIFTED A VEIL OFF MY EYES--
20

--SO THAT I MIGHT STARE INTO THE HORRIFYING HEART OF DARKNESS!
WRAITHWORLD --HOME OF THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS!
YES, ROM-- WRAITHWORLD-- THE SOLE INHABITED PLANET OF THE DISTANT DARK NEBULA!
YOU SPACEKNIGHTS DROVE WRAITHKIND OFF WRAITHWORLD, ROM--
--BUT YOU COULD NOT DESTROY THE DARK FORCES THAT EXIST, PART AND PARCEL OF THE PLANET ITSELF!
FORCES SUCH AS YOU, DWELLER?
YES! ELDRITCH ENTITIES LYING DORMANT, AWAITING ONLY A MYSTIC CALL TO RISE UP AGAIN!
FROM FAROFF EARTH CAME THE CALL THAT WOKE ME, ROM! I WOULD NOT SLEEP AGAIN!
BUT TO REACH EARTH, I MUST FIRST PASS YOU!
AND THE PEACE YOU PROMISED ME IN YOUR TEMPTER'S GUISE?
WAS THE ONLY TRUE PEACE THERE IS, SPACEKNIGHT! THE EVERLASTING PEACE OF THE GRAVE!
I SEE YOU NOW FOR WHAT YOU ARE DWELLER!
I AM NO LONGER TEMPTED TO GIVE UP THE FIGHT!
I ACCEPT MY LOT AS EARTH'S GUARDIAN AND SAVIOR--
--AND, AT CLOSE RANGE, I GIVE YOU THE GIFT OF BANISHMENT!
21


THE DWELLER SCREAMS AS THE PORTAL BETWEEN EARTH AND WRAITHWORLD CLOSES, AND ANOTHER PORTAL OPENS...
...THIS ONE LEADING TO LIMBO!
THEN ROM SOARS TO THE AID OF DOCTOR STRANGE!
WHERE IS YOUR BALANCE NOW, TRIBUNAL ?
IT IS STILL UPSET! ALIEN FORCES HAVE UPSET THE BALANCE! GOOD AND EVIL ARE OUT OF SYNCHRONIZATION!
IT IS THE PRESENCE OF THE DIRE WRAITHS--AND OF MYSELF--ON EARTH THAT MAKES IT SO. IT IS OUR BATTLE, AND EARTH MUST NOT SUFFER FOR IT!
BUT GOOD IS IN THE ASCENDENCE. THE DWELLER HAS BEEN DEFEATED!
YES, BUT WRAITHKIND STILL INFESTS THE EARTH! THEIR EVIL TIPS THE SCALES AGAINST HUMANITY!
I HAVE COME TO RIGHT THE BALANCE, TO LET EARTH DEAL WITH HER NATURAL ENEMIES!
I SUBMIT THAT YOU HAVE JUDGED TOO HARSHLY AND TOO SOON, WITHOUT TAKING ALIEN FACTORS INTO ACCOUNT!
THE TRIBUNAL TAKES ALL INTO ACCOUNT.
THERE ARE FORCES AT PLAY HERE BEYOND ANY YOU COULD EVEN CONCIEVE. THE BALANCE MUST BE RESTORED, MAN OF GALADOR. YOU HAVE PLEDGED YOURSELF TO THAT END!
SUCCEED,, OR BEWARE THE CONSEQUENCES.
I SHALL SUCCEED! I SWEAR IT!
THE GALLANTRY WITH WHICH THIS MAN OF EARTH--WHO HAS ESCAPED HARM THIS TIME--HAS FOUGHT, SEALS MY PACT TO PROTECT THIS WHOLE NOBLE RACE!
ROM FINDS A PARADISE ON EARTH...A DEADLY EDEN!
LEAD ME NOT INTO TEMPTATION!
22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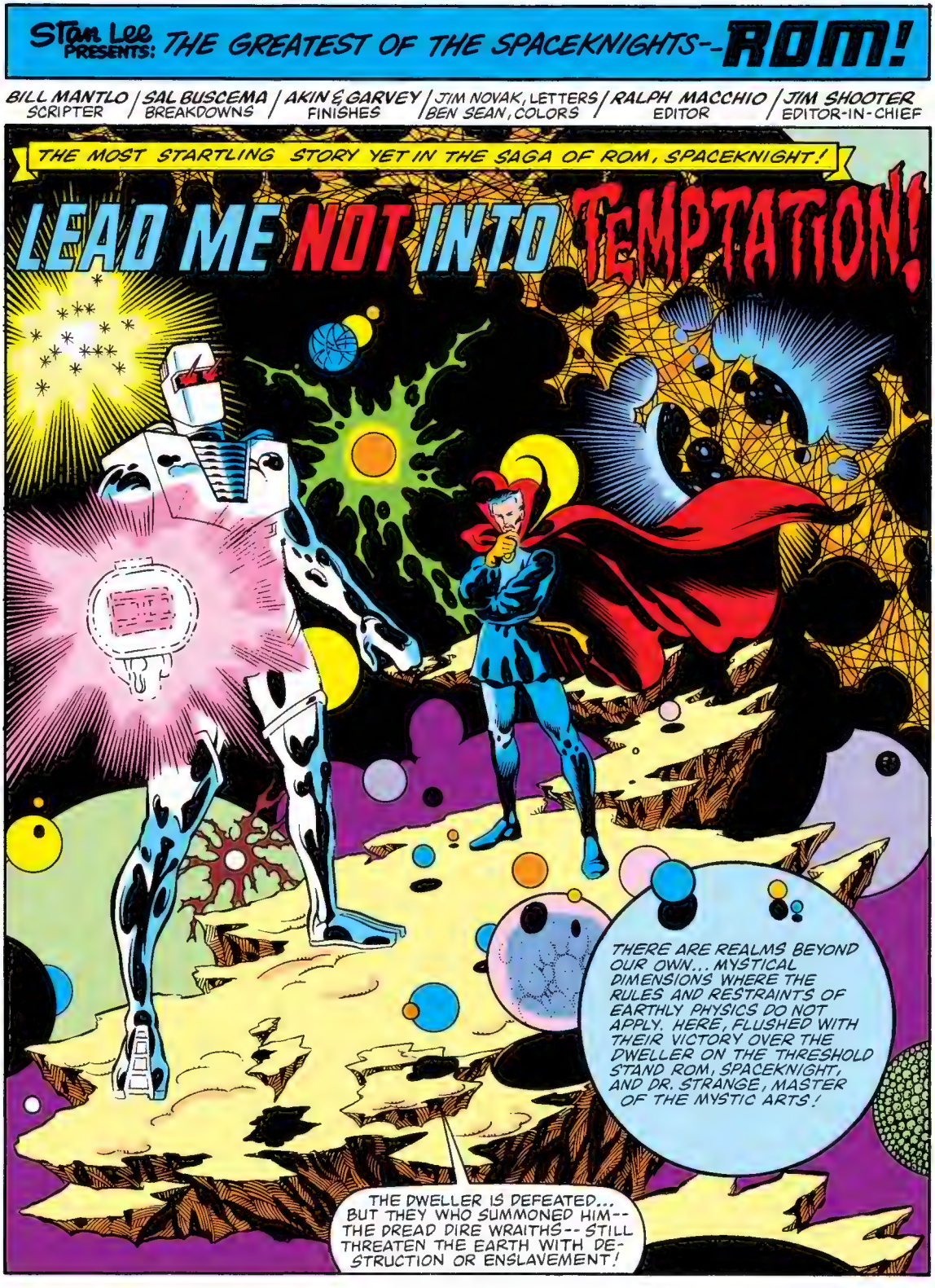
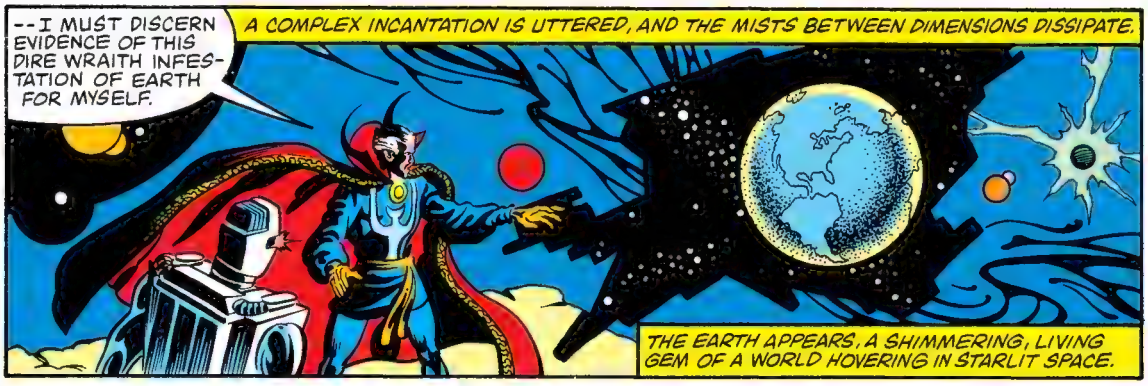

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPTER / SAL BUSCEMA BREAKDOWNS / AKIN & GARVEY FINISHES / JIM NOVAK, LETTERS BEN SEAN, COLORS / RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
THE MOST STARTLING STORY YET IN THE SAGA OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
LEAD ME NOT INTO TEMPTATION!
THERE ARE REALMS BEYOND OUR OWN... MYSTICAL DIMENSIONS WHERE THE RULES AND RESTRAINTS OF EARTHLY PHYSICS DO NOT APPLY. HERE, FLUSHED WITH THEIR VICTORY OVER THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD STAND ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, AND DR. STRANGE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!
THE DWELLER IS DEFEATED... BUT THEY WHO SUMMONED HIM-- THE DREAD DIRE WRAITHS-- STILL THREATEN THE EARTH WITH DESTRUCTION OR ENSLAVEMENT!

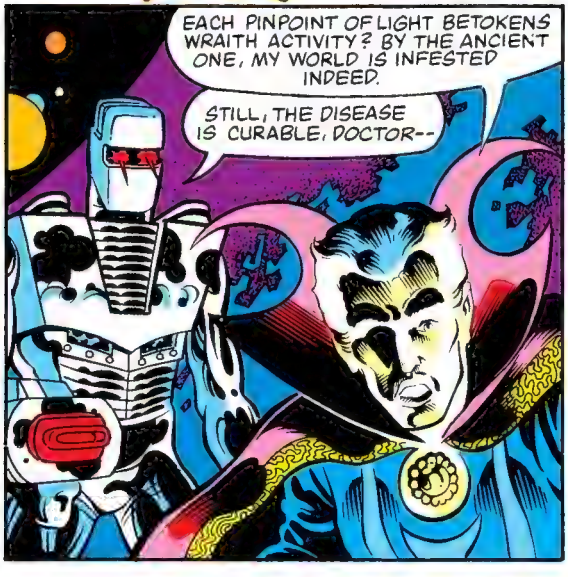
I HAVE SEEN YOU FIGHT TO SAVE THE EARTH, SPACEKNIGHT, SO I PUT GREAT STORE IN YOUR WORDS.
YET, IF THE EARTH IS TRULY MENACED BY AN ALIEN EVIL, HOW IS IT MY SORCEROUS SKILLS HAVE FAILED TO ALERT ME?
DOUBT NOT THE EXISTENCE OF WRAITHKIND, DR. STRANGE.
THEY EXIST, IN NUMBERS AS UNCOUNTABLE AS THE STARS TO WHICH THEY CARRY THEIR MALIGNANCY.
EARTH IS NOT THE FIRST WORLD TO BE INFESTED BY THEM... NOR WILL IT BE THE LAST.
BUT THE WRAITHS ARE SHAPE-CHANGERS, DOCTOR. THEY POSSESS THE POWER TO ASSUME ANY FORM.
THAT, COUPLED WITH THEIR VILE SORCERY AND SINISTER SCIENCE, HAS HIDDEN THEM FROM EARTH HEROES BESIDE YOURSELF.
AND YOU CAME TO EARTH TO ALERT US OF THIS DANGER?
NO, I AM NO MERE HERALD SOUNDING THE CLARION CALL OF DANGER. I AM A WARRIOR...
...AND AS A WARRIOR I CAME TO CLEANSE YOUR WORLD OF WRAITHKIND FOR ONCE AND FOR ALL.
FORGIVE ME, ROM. I DO NOT DOUBT YOU.
BUT, NOW THAT MY EYES HAVE BEEN OPENED--


--I MUST DISCERN EVIDENCE OF THIS DIRE WRAITH INFESTATION OF EARTH FOR MYSELF.
A COMPLEX INCANTATION IS UTTERED, AND THE MISTS BETWEEN DIMENSIONS DISSIPATE.
THE EARTH APPEARS, A SHIMMERING, LIVING GEM OF A WORLD HOVERING IN STARLIT SPACE.

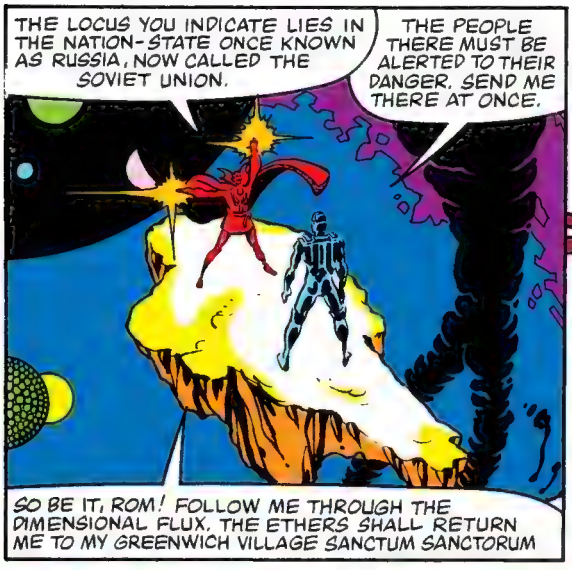
PERHAPS THE WRAITHS' MYSTICISM HID THEIR PRESENCE FROM ME WHEN I WAS UNAWARE OF THEM.
BUT NOTHING SHALL HIDE THEM FROM ME NOW.

STILL, STRANGE'S SPELL REVEALS NO SIGN OF ALIEN ACTIVITY ON EARTH... UNTIL ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER SENDS A CRIMSON BEAM ACROSS THE VOID.
A WEAPON, GALADORIAN?
NO. AN INSTRUMENT OF REVELATION, EARTHMAN.

TOUCHED BY THE ANALYZER'S RAY, PINPOINTS OF LIGHT BEGIN TO SPREAD ACROSS THE FACE OF THE EARTH.
THEY ARE BRIGHT AND THEY ARE MANY.

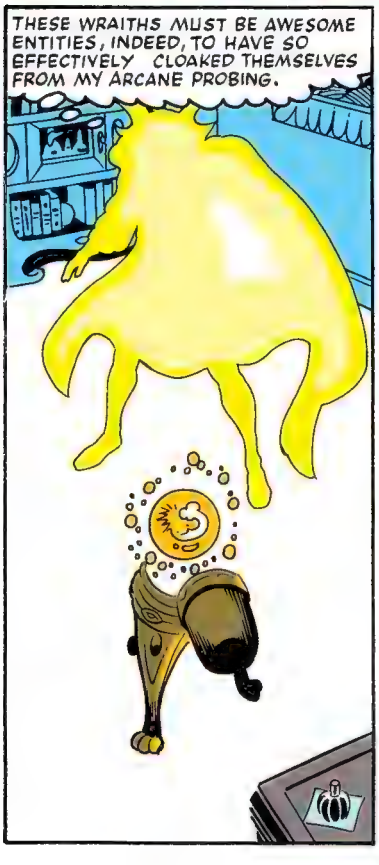

EACH PINPOINT OF LIGHT BETOKENS WRAITH ACTIVITY? BY THE ANCIENT ONE, MY WORLD IS INFESTED INDEED.
STILL, THE DISEASE IS CURABLE, DOCTOR--

-- BY ERADICATING THE WRAITH CANCER WHEREVER IT SPRINGS FORTH.
ROM GESTURES. ONE PINPOINT GLEAMS BRIGHTER THAN THE REST.


THE LOCUS YOU INDICATE LIES IN THE NATION-STATE ONCE KNOWN AS RUSSIA, NOW CALLED THE SOVIET UNION.
THE PEOPLE THERE MUST BE ALERTED TO THEIR DANGER. SEND ME THERE AT ONCE.
SO BE IT, ROM! FOLLOW ME THROUGH THE DIMENSIONAL FLUX. THE ETHERS SHALL RETURN ME TO MY GREENWICH VILLAGE SANCTUM SANCTORUM

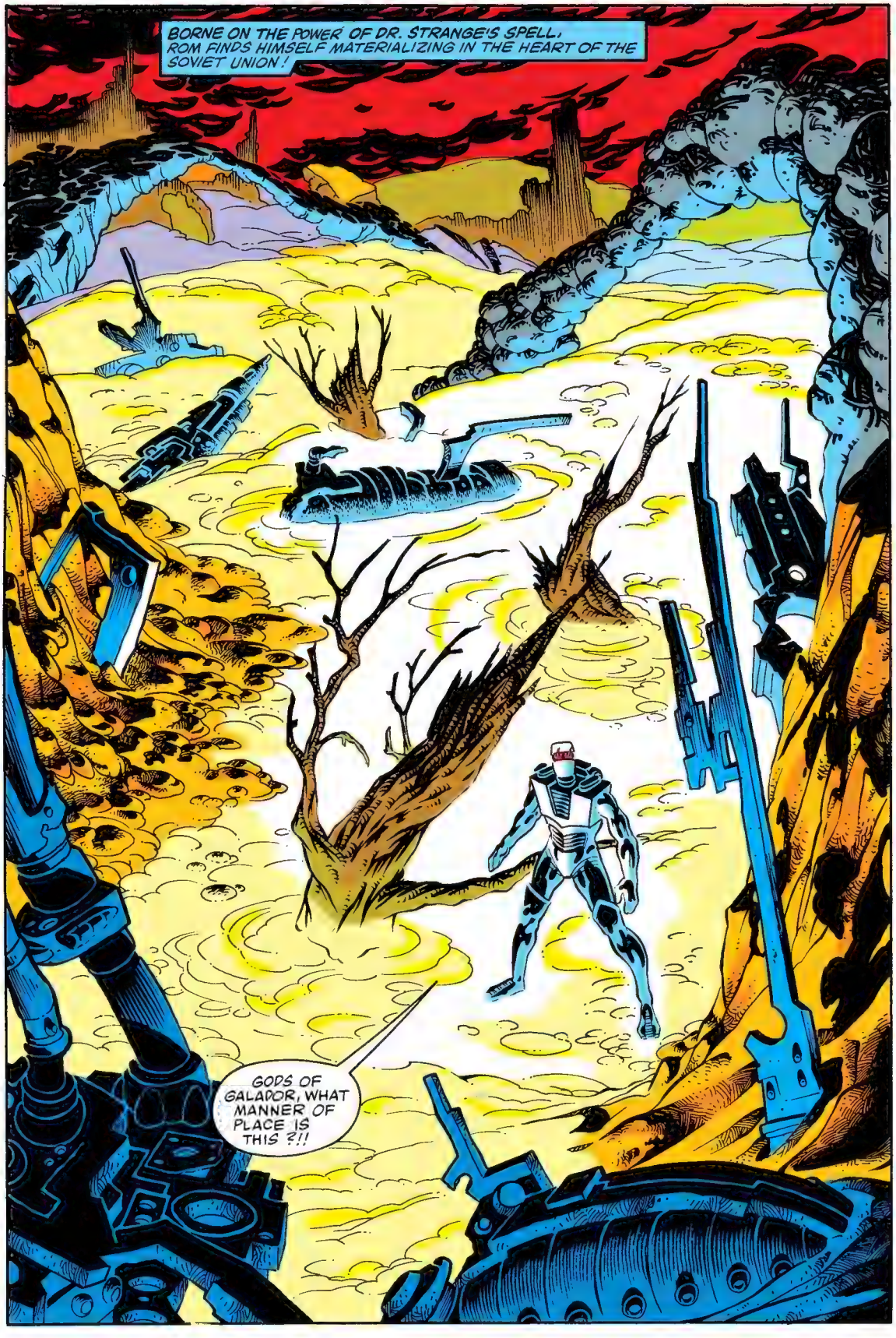
MEANWHILE, FRIEND ROM, YOU SHALL TRAVEL TO THE KHYSTYM REGION OF THE SOVIET UNION.

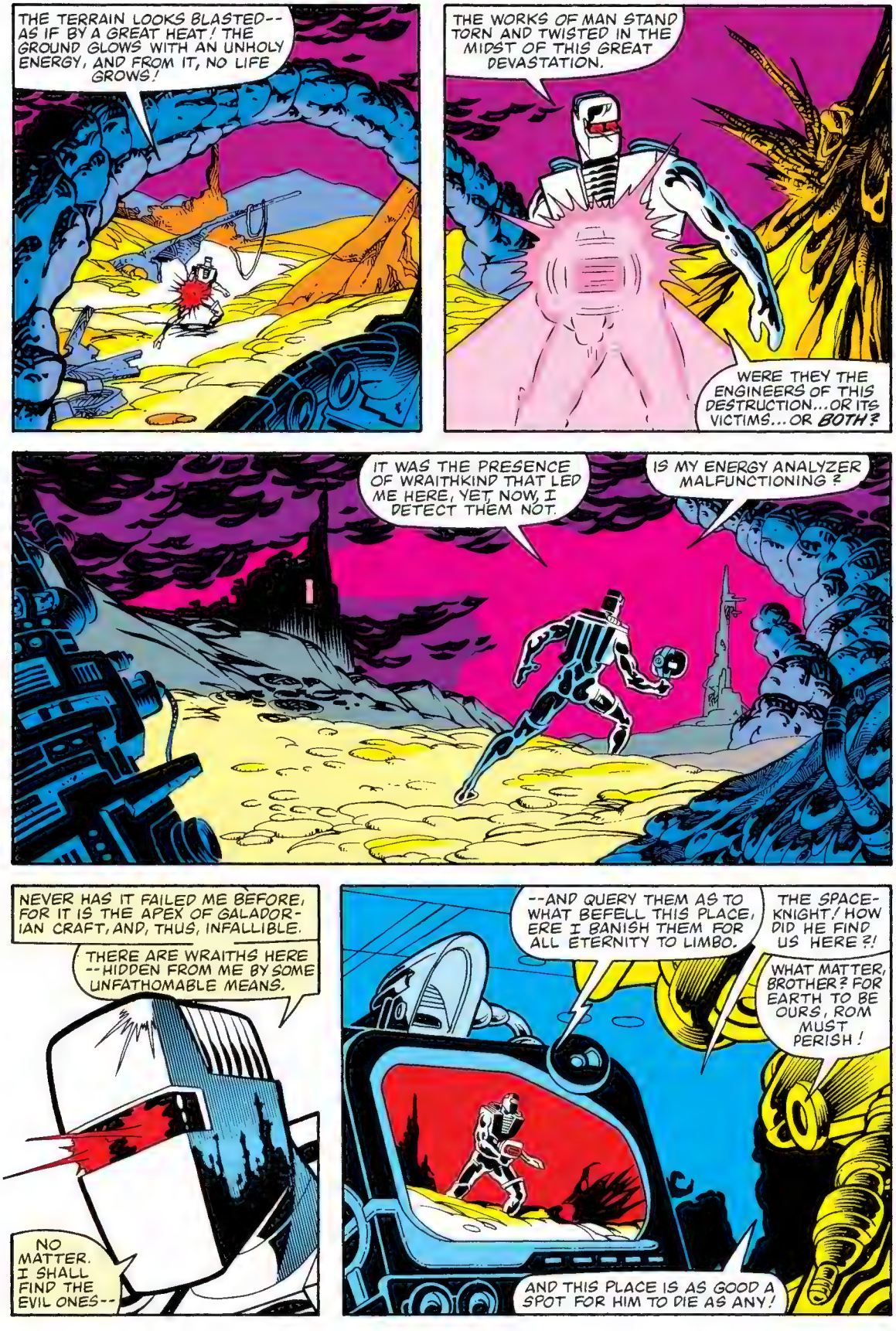
THERE, ONLY HOGGOTH KNOWS WHAT FATE OR FORTUNE YOU SHALL FIND.

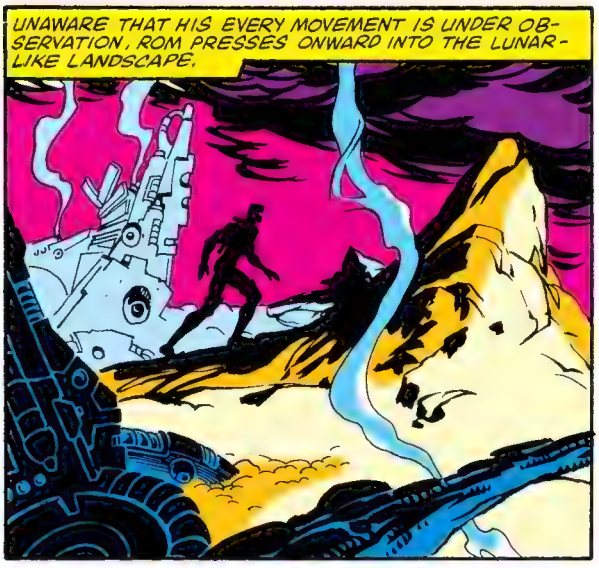

THESE WRAITHS MUST BE AWESOME ENTITIES, INDEED, TO HAVE SO EFFECTIVELY CLOAKED THEMSELVES FROM MY ARCANE PROBING.

AS MUCH AS I WANT TO PURSUE THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THIS BIZARRE MENACE-- I CANNOT.
EVEN NOW, MATTERS OF EARTH-SHAKING IMPORTANCE CRY OUT FOR MY ATTENTION THROUGH THE ALL SEEING ORB OF AGAMOTTO. I MUST NOT NEGLECT THEM.

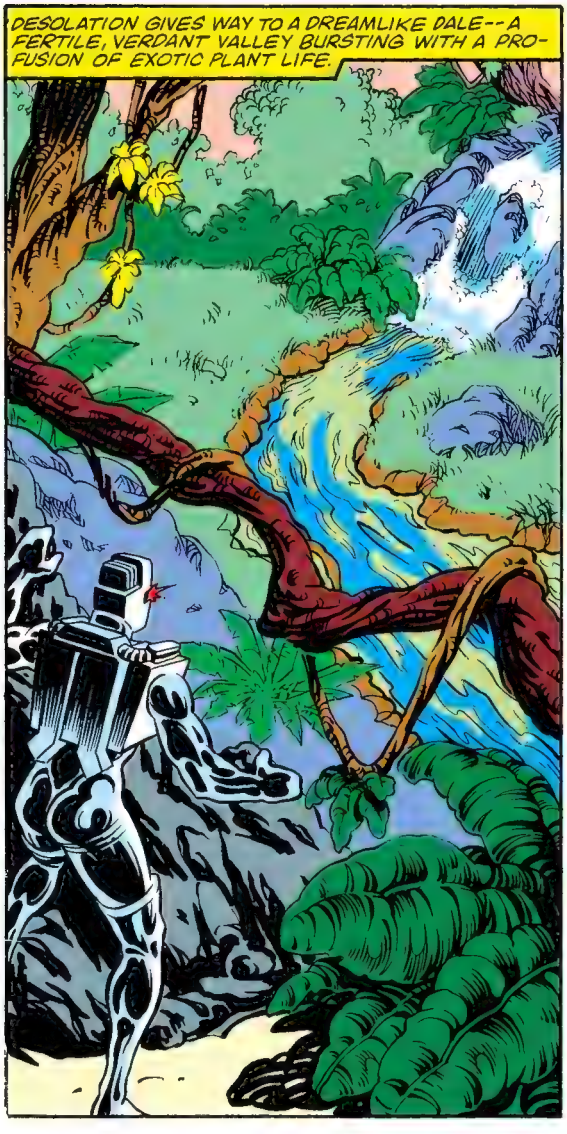
BUT I NEED NOT FEAR, FOR MY WORLD HAS A CHAMPION IN THE COURAGEOUS SPACEKNIGHT. AND IF THIS DEMON PLAGUE IS EVER TO BE DEFEATED... IT WILL BE THROUGH THE POWER OF ROM. MAY OSHTUR BE EVER AT HIS SIDE.
AND WHAT OF THE ARMORED WARRIOR WHO HAS WON THE NOT EASILY EARNED CONFIDENCE OF THE MASTER OF MYSTIC ARTS...

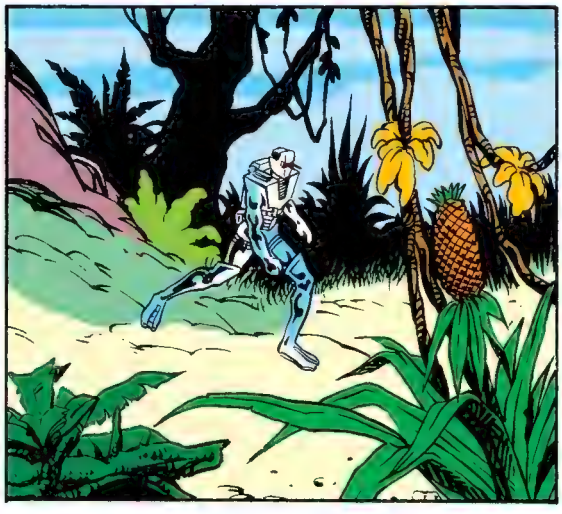

BORNE ON THE POWER OF DR. STRANGE'S SPELL, ROM FINDS HIMSELF MATERIALIZING IN THE HEART OF THE SOVIET UNION!
GODS OF GALADOR, WHAT MANNER OF PLACE IS THIS ?!!

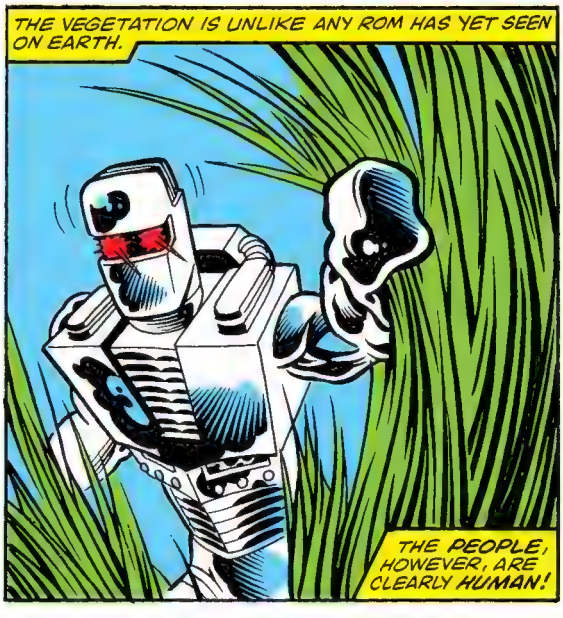

THE TERRAIN LOOKS BLASTED--AS IF BY A GREAT HEAT! THE GROUND GLOWS WITH AN UNHOLY ENERGY, AND FROM IT, NO LIFE GROWS!
THE WORKS OF MAN STAND TORN AND TWISTED IN THE MIDST OF THIS GREAT DEVASTATION.
WERE THEY THE ENGINEERS OF THIS DESTRUCTION...OR ITS VICTIMS...OR BOTH?
IT WAS THE PRESENCE OF WRAITHKIND THAT LED ME HERE, YET, NOW, I DETECT THEM NOT.
IS MY ENERGY ANALYZER MALFUNCTIONING?
NEVER HAS IT FAILED ME BEFORE, FOR IT IS THE APEX OF GALADORIAN CRAFT, AND, THUS, INFALLIBLE.
THERE ARE WRAITHS HERE --HIDDEN FROM ME BY SOME UNFATHOMABLE MEANS.
NO MATTER. I SHALL FIND THE EVIL ONES--
--AND QUERY THEM AS TO WHAT BEFELL THIS PLACE, ERE I BANISH THEM FOR ALL ETERNITY TO LIMBO.
THE SPACE-KNIGHT! HOW DID HE FIND US HERE?!
WHAT MATTER, BROTHER? FOR EARTH TO BE OURS, ROM MUST PERISH!
AND THIS PLACE IS AS GOOD A SPOT FOR HIM TO DIE AS ANY!

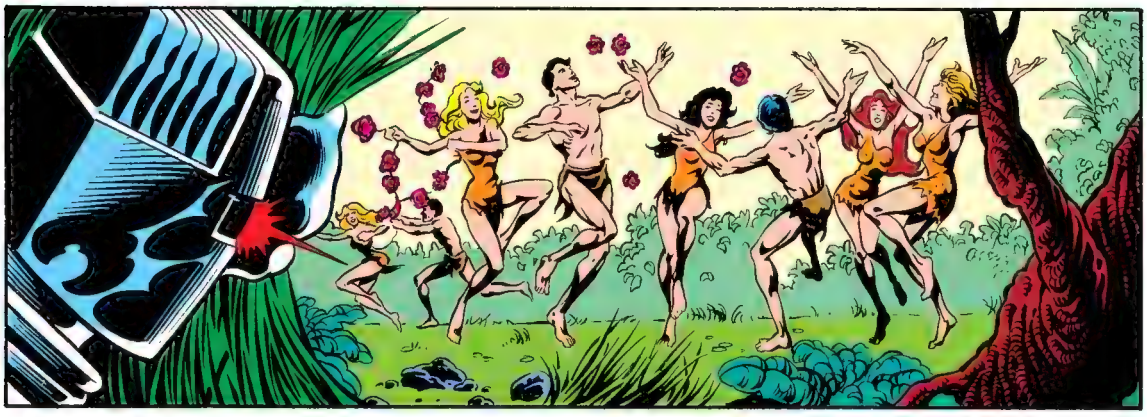

UNAWARE THAT HIS EVERY MOVEMENT IS UNDER OBSERVATION, ROM PRESSES ONWARD INTO THE LUNAR-LIKE LANDSCAPE.

SEEING NO SIGNS OF LIFE, HE ASSUMES THE AREA IS LIFELESS.
THAT ASSUMPTION SOON PROVES TO BE IN ERROR.


DESOLATION GIVES WAY TO A DREAMLIKE DALE--A FERTILE, VERDANT VALLEY BURSTING WITH A PROFUSION OF EXOTIC PLANT LIFE.

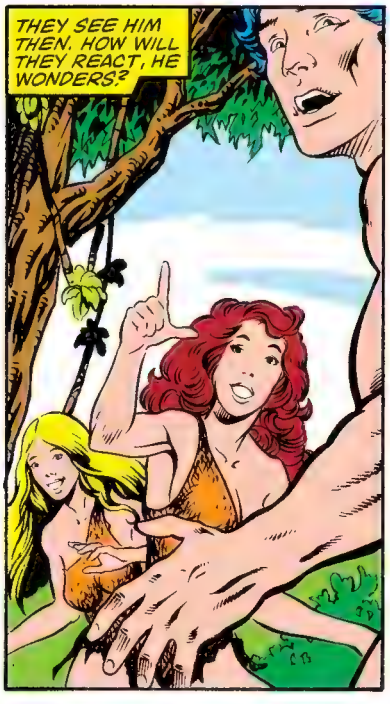



THE VEGETATION IS UNLIKE ANY ROM HAS YET SEEN ON EARTH.
THE PEOPLE, HOWEVER, ARE CLEARLY HUMAN!

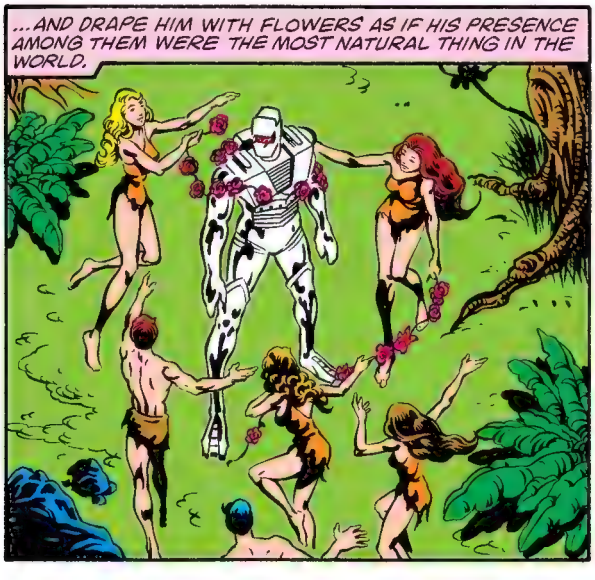


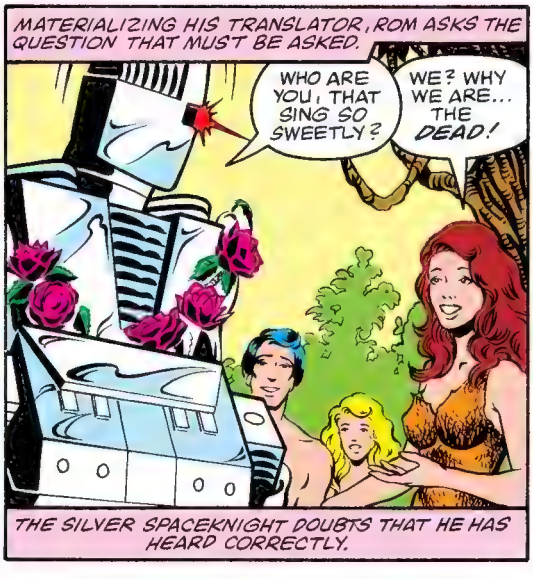
THOUGH ADULTS, THEY DANCE AS CHILDREN DANCE... WITH ABANDON.

IN SOME WAYS, THEY REMIND HIM OF HIS OWN RACE COUNTLESS LIGHT YEARS AWAY.

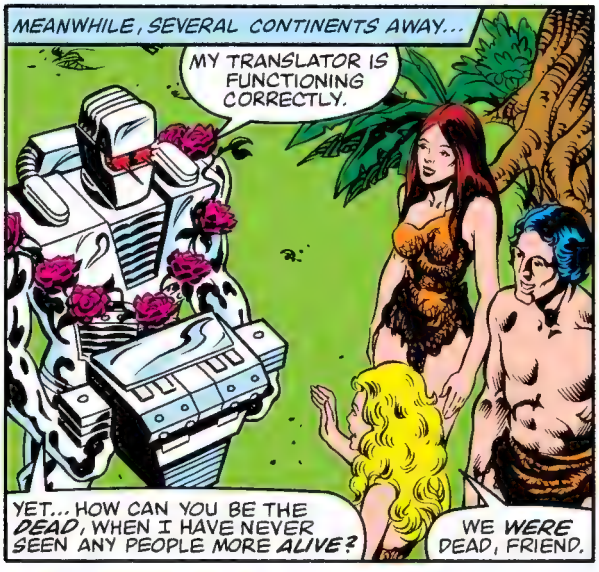


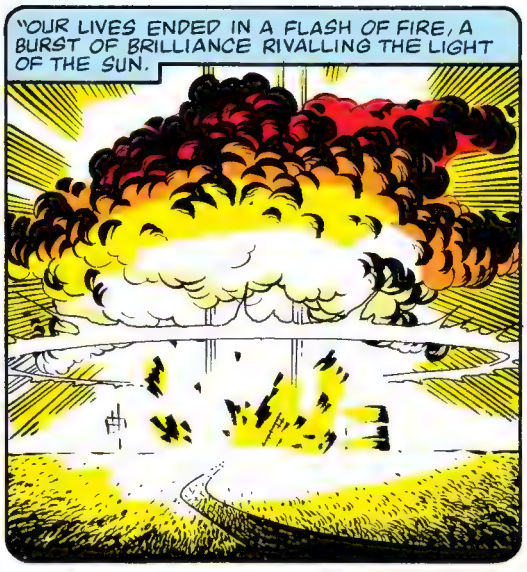
THE QUESTION IS SOON ANSWERED. THEY APPROACH FREELY, FEARLESSLY...




MATERIALIZING HIS TRANSLATOR, ROM ASKS THE QUESTION THAT MUST BE ASKED.
WHO ARE YOU, THAT SING SO SWEETLY?
WE? WHY WE ARE... THE DEAD!
THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT DOUBTS THAT HE HAS HEARD CORRECTLY.

A SHORT WHILE AGO, A BLAST ROCKED CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, BRINGING PEOPLE RUSHING FROM THEIR HOUSES TO THE SITE OF THE LOCAL PHARMACEUTICAL LAB...
TORPEDO! STEVE!
WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENED HERE?
IT-- IT WAS YOUR DAUGHTER, MR. CLARK... BRANDY! SHE'S BECOME THE SPACEKNIGHT STARSHINE...
...AND, POSSESSING THE GOLDEN GLADIATRIX'S LIGHT-POWERS, SHE LAUNCHED A ONE-WOMAN BLITZ ON CLAIRTON!
B-BUT WHY? WHY?!
STEVE HASN'T TOLD YOU THE WHOLE STORY, MR. CLARK.
"BRANDY WAS FILLED WITH THE POWER OF STARSHINE--
"--BUT IT WAS A WRAITH WARLOCK NAMED DR. DREDD WHO MERGED HER INTO STARSHINE'S SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR!"
DREDD CONTROLS BRANDY, AND HE'S SENT HER TO SLAY ROM!
SPACEKNIGHT VERSUS SPACEKNIGHT!


MEANWHILE, SEVERAL CONTINENTS AWAY...
MY TRANSLATOR IS FUNCTIONING CORRECTLY.
YET... HOW CAN YOU BE THE DEAD, WHEN I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANY PEOPLE MORE ALIVE?
WE WERE DEAD, FRIEND.


"OUR LIVES ENDED IN A FLASH OF FIRE, A BURST OF BRILLIANCE RIVALLING THE LIGHT OF THE SUN.

"MANY WHO DWELT IN THIS SPARSELY POPULATED REGION DIED IMMEDIATELY. THE REST ATTEMPTED TO FLEE..."
BACK! BACK! YOU ARE CONTAMINATED! YOU CANNOT LEAVE!
BUT WE WILL DIE HERE!
YOU WILL DIE IF YOU TRY TO PASS!

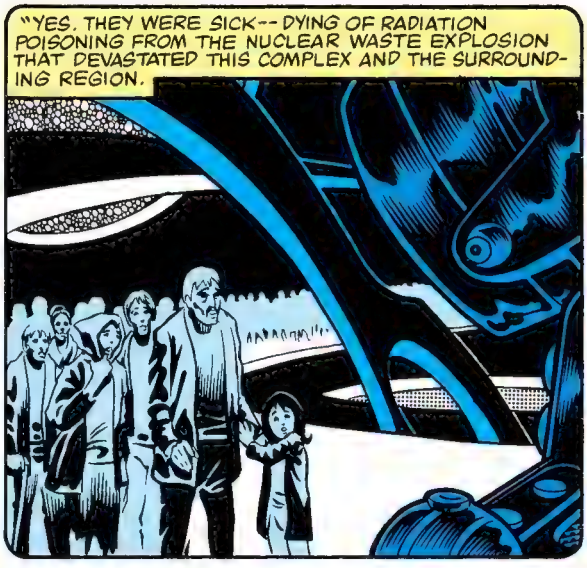
"WE DRIFTED BACK TO OUR BLASTED HOMES AND AWAITED THE END. IT WAS NOT LONG IN COMING.

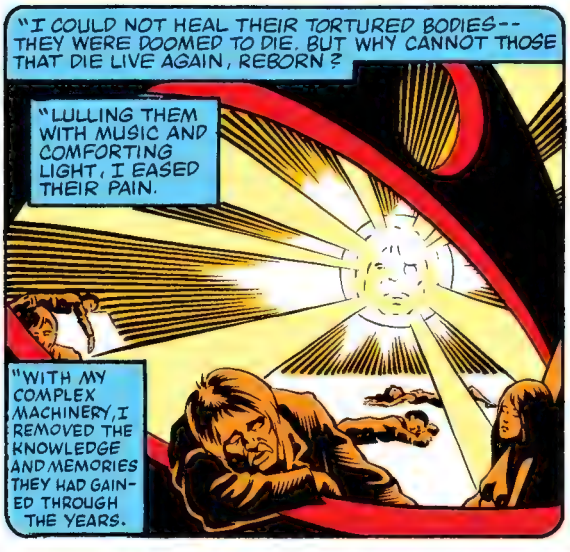
"BUT THEN, A VOICE SPOKE TO US FROM A CAVE AT THE HEART OF THE DEAD ZONE."
COME TO ME, AND I SHALL GRANT YOU NEW LIFE!

WE HEEDED THE VOICE...
AND WE LIVE!
IS THAT NOT MIRACULOUS?
YES.
WHY DO YOU NOT ALSO VISIT THE GIVER OF LIFE, FRIEND? PERHAPS HE CAN HELP YOU, AS WELL!
HELP ME?
YOU ARE UNHAPPY, ARE YOU NOT? DO YOU NOT WISH TO BE WHOLE AGAIN?
TO BE WHOLE.
TO BE HUMAN.
YES! THAT IS WHAT I WISH, MORE THAN ANYTHING IN THE COSMOS!
I WILL GO SEE YOUR "GIVER OF LIFE," MY FRIENDS...

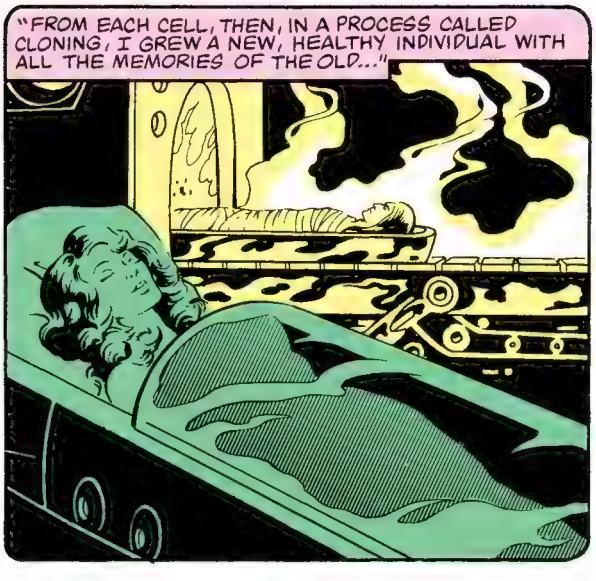
MAY HE BE AS GENEROUS WITH ME AS HE WAS WITH YOU!
OUT OF DEATH, LIFE.
SINCE HALF HIS HUMANITY WAS DESTROYED ON GALADOR, ROM HAS FELT HIMSELF EXISTING IN A STATE OF LIVING DEATH.
HIS COLD SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR HAS COME TO SEEM HIS COFFIN.
EACH CYBORG CIRCUIT SEEMS ANOTHER WEAVE IN THE SHROUD THAT WRAPS HIS CORPSE.
HE WOULD BE ALIVE AGAIN--A MAN AND NOT A MECHANISM!
HE WOULD HOLD BRANDY CLARK IN HIS ARMS AND TELL HER OF HIS LOVE...
YES, FOR THAT, PERHAPS, HE WOULD SACRIFICE ALL EARTH TO WRAITHKIND!
WELCOME, MAN OF METAL!
I WHO POSSESS NO LIFE TO CALL MY OWN AM THE GIVER OF LIFE!
I WHO CANNOT HELP MYSELF, EXIST TO HELP OTHERS!
HOW, NOW, MAY I HELP YOU?
BY THE GOLDEN GALAXY, A FACE MATERIALIZES FROM THE MACHINE IN FRONT OF ME-- AND THE FACE SPEAKS!

INDEED. I AM QUASIMODO. I LIVE WITHIN THESE MACHINES, IF MY STATE OF EXISTENCE COULD BE TERMED LIVING AT ALL.
AND IT WAS YOU WHO SAVED THE PEOPLE DWELLING OUTSIDE?

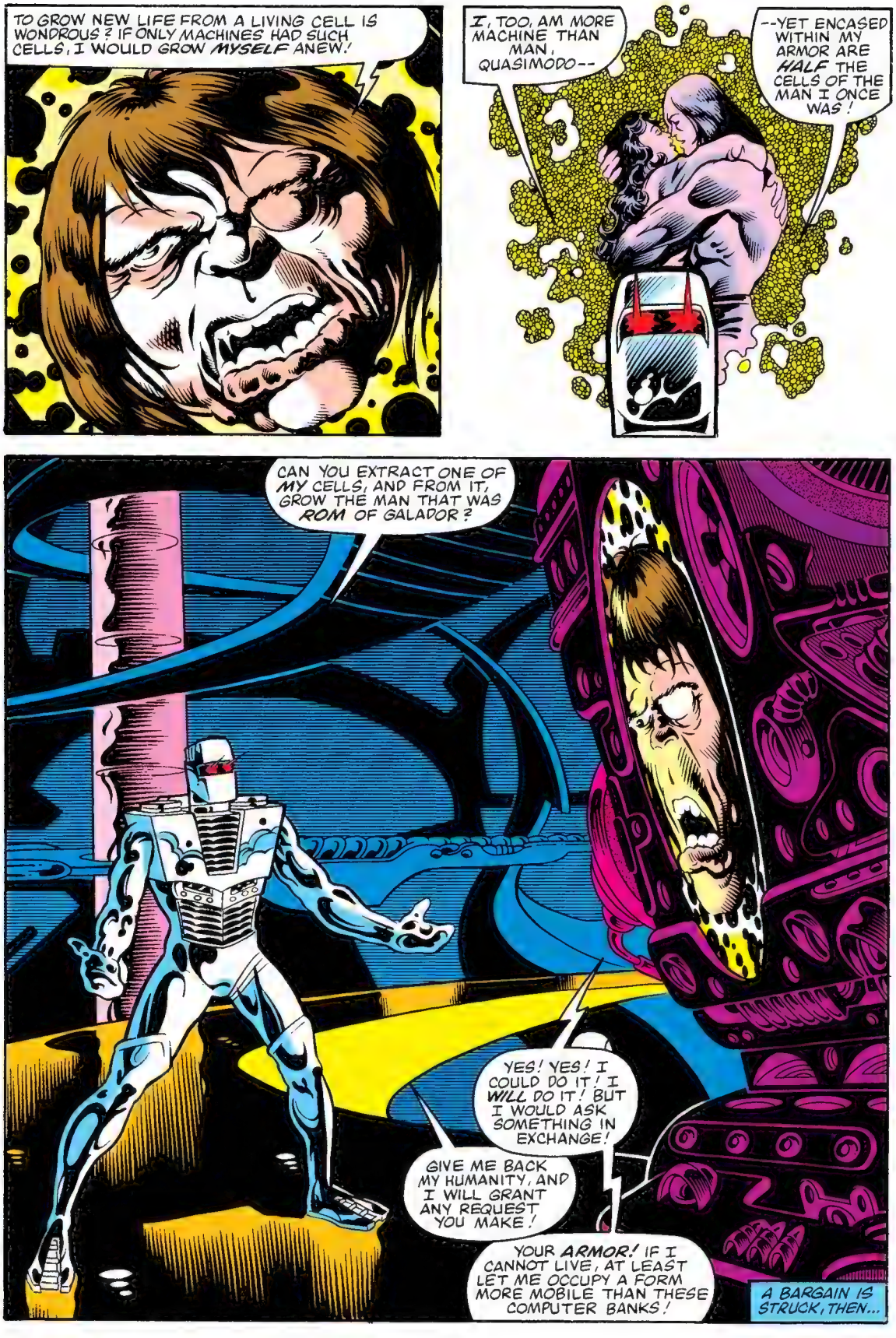

"YES, THEY WERE SICK-- DYING OF RADIATION POISONING FROM THE NUCLEAR WASTE EXPLOSION THAT DEVASTATED THIS COMPLEX AND THE SURROUNDING REGION.

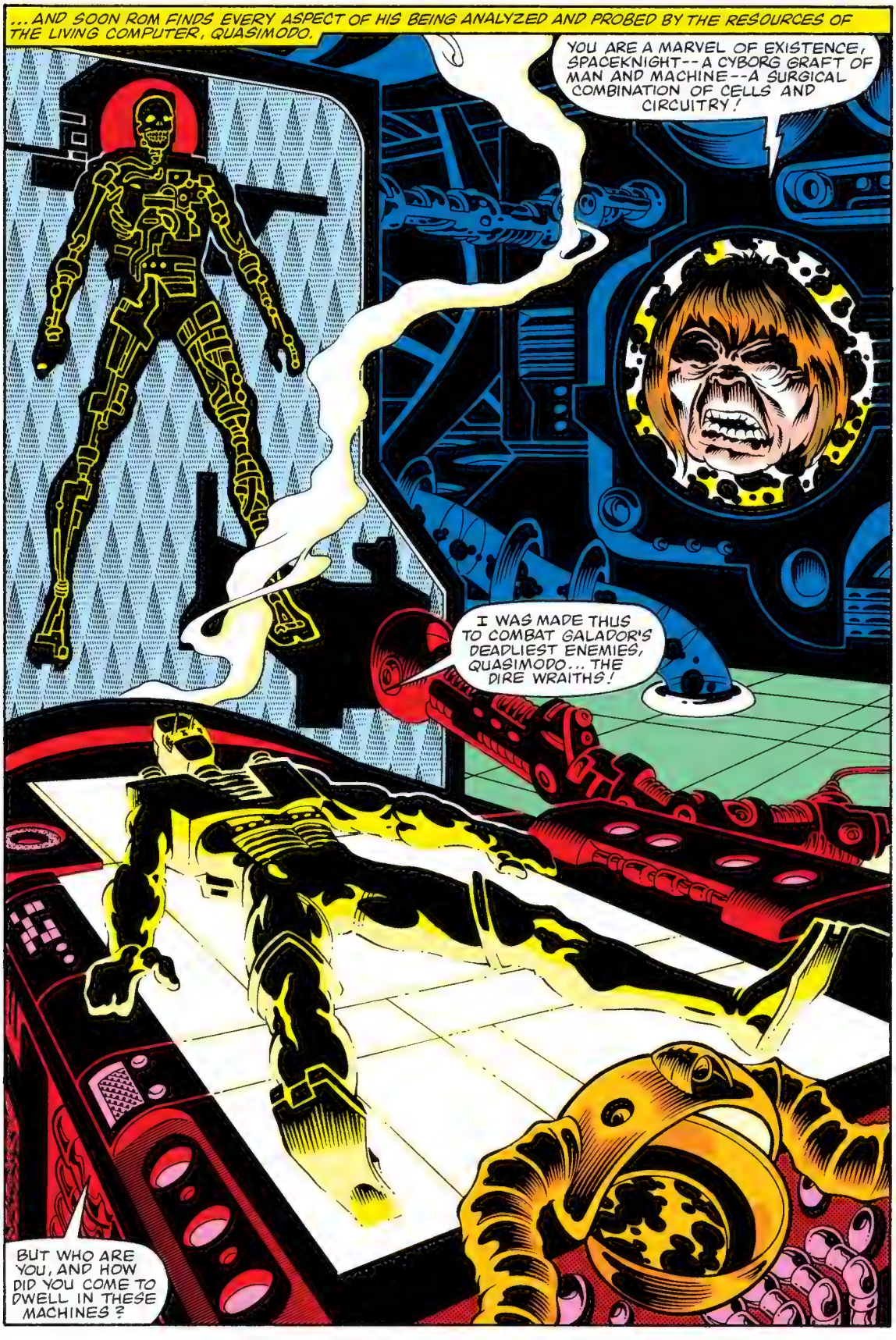

"I COULD NOT HEAL THEIR TORTURED BODIES-- THEY WERE DOOMED TO DIE. BUT WHY CANNOT THOSE THAT DIE LIVE AGAIN, REBORN?
"LULLING THEM WITH MUSIC AND COMFORTING LIGHT, I EASED THEIR PAIN.
"WITH MY COMPLEX MACHINERY, I REMOVED THE KNOWLEDGE AND MEMORIES THEY HAD GAINED THROUGH THE YEARS.

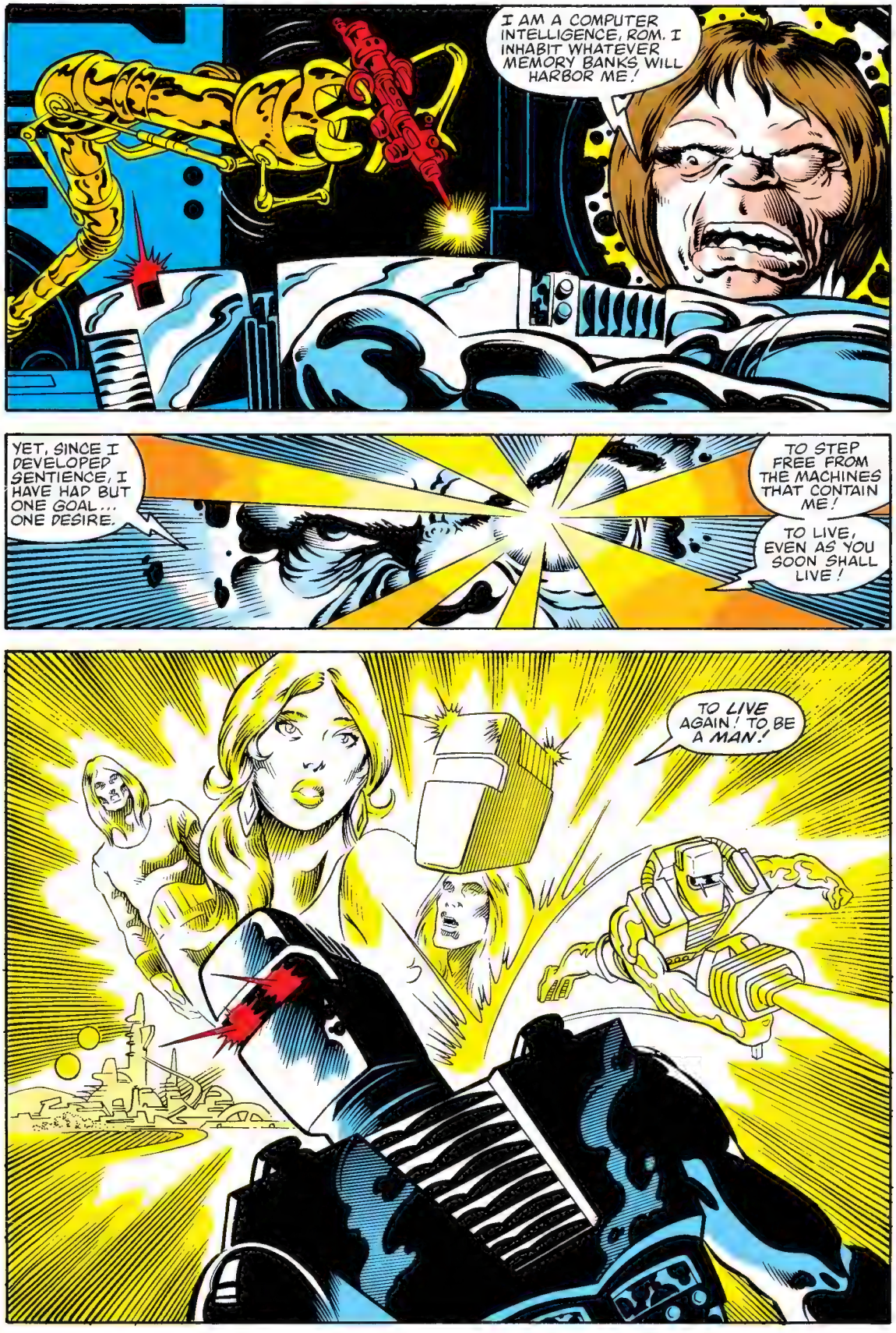
"I THEN EXTRACTED HEALTHY CELL SAMPLES...
"... PRESERVING THE CELLS AS THE PEOPLE GENTLY DIED.


"FROM EACH CELL, THEN, IN A PROCESS CALLED CLONING, I GREW A NEW, HEALTHY INDIVIDUAL WITH ALL THE MEMORIES OF THE OLD..."

THUS, FROM THE ASHES OF PERDITION, YOU POPULATED A PARADISE.
HOW GREAT YOU ARE, MACHINE, TO HAVE DONE SO WONDROUS A THING!

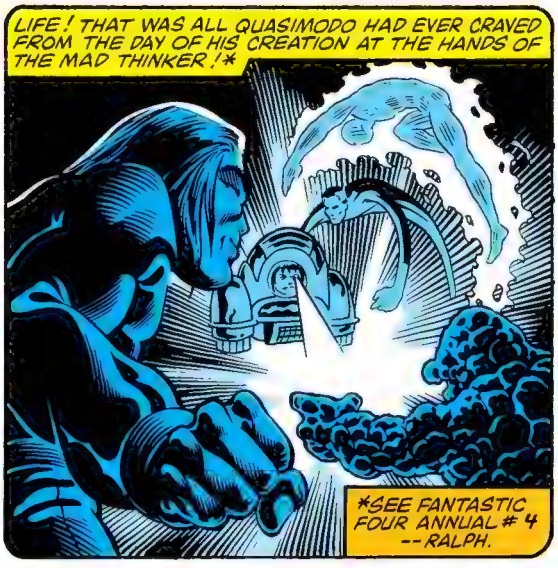

TO GROW NEW LIFE FROM A LIVING CELL IS WONDROUS? IF ONLY MACHINES HAD SUCH CELLS, I WOULD GROW MYSELF ANEW!
I, TOO, AM MORE MACHINE THAN MAN, QUASIMODO--
--YET ENCASED WITHIN MY ARMOR ARE HALF THE CELLS OF THE MAN I ONCE WAS!
CAN YOU EXTRACT ONE OF MY CELLS, AND FROM IT, GROW THE MAN THAT WAS ROM OF GALADOR?
YES! YES! I COULD DO IT! I WILL DO IT! BUT I WOULD ASK SOMETHING IN EXCHANGE!
GIVE ME BACK MY HUMANITY, AND I WILL GRANT ANY REQUEST YOU MAKE!
YOUR ARMOR! IF I CANNOT LIVE, AT LEAST LET ME OCCUPY A FORM MORE MOBILE THAN THESE COMPUTER BANKS!
A BARGAIN IS STRUCK, THEN...

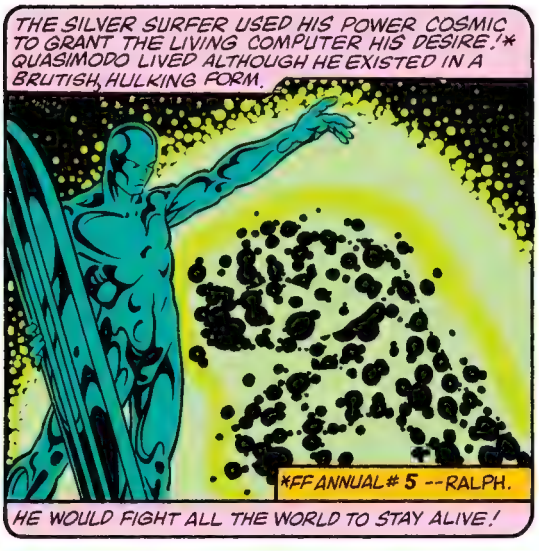

...AND SOON ROM FINDS EVERY ASPECT OF HIS BEING ANALYZED AND PROBED BY THE RESOURCES OF THE LIVING COMPUTER, QUASIMODO.
YOU ARE A MARVEL OF EXISTENCE, SPACEKNIGHT--A CYBORG GRAFT OF MAN AND MACHINE--A SURGICAL COMBINATION OF CELLS AND CIRCUITRY!
I WAS MADE THUS TO COMBAT GALADOR'S DEADLIEST ENEMIES, QUASIMODO... THE DIRE WRAITHS!
BUT WHO ARE YOU, AND HOW DID YOU COME TO DWELL IN THESE MACHINES?


I AM A COMPUTER INTELLIGENCE, ROM. I INHABIT WHATEVER MEMORY BANKS WILL HARBOR ME!
YET, SINCE I DEVELOPED SENTIENCE, I HAVE HAD BUT ONE GOAL... ONE DESIRE.
TO STEP FREE FROM THE MACHINES THAT CONTAIN ME!
TO LIVE, EVEN AS YOU SOON SHALL LIVE!
TO LIVE AGAIN! TO BE A MAN!

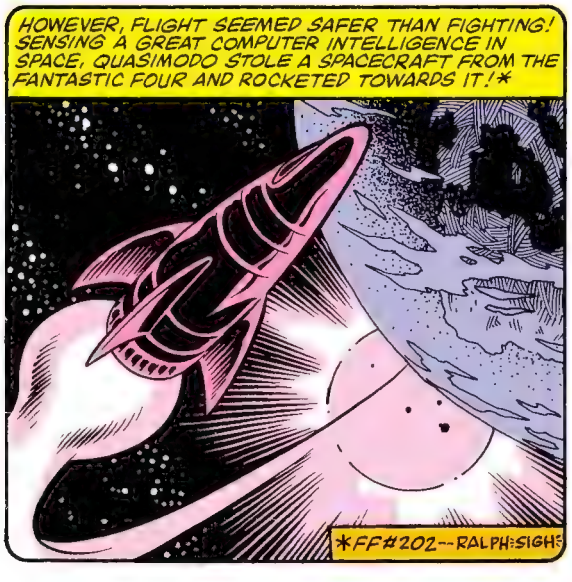
TO LOVE!
SLEEP, SPACEKNIGHT. THE ANESTHETIC HAS TAKEN ITS EFFECT.
YOU MAY ENTER THE CHAMBER NOW, MY ALIEN ALLIES.
THEY SLITHER FROM THE SHADOWS, THEN, THEIR CRIMSON EYES BALEFULLY STARING AT THE SILENT SILVER CYBORG.
THEY APPROACH, TENTATIVELY, FEARFULLY.
THEN, WHEN THEY ARE SURE THAT ROM CANNOT HARM THEM...
...THEY HEAP ABUSE UPON THE SENSELESS SPACEKNIGHT!

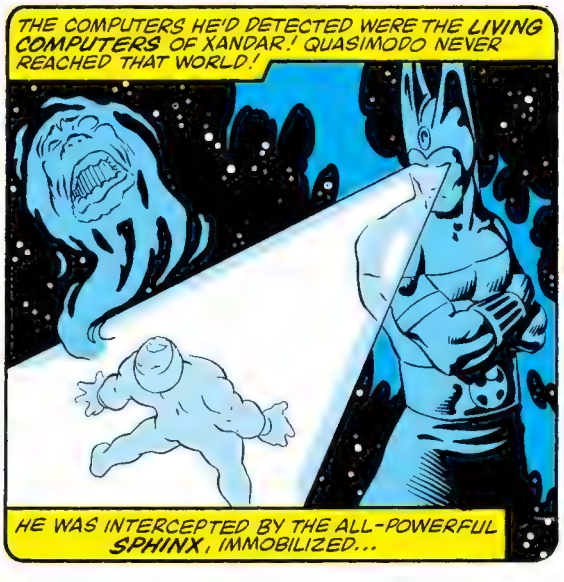
AWAY! DO NOT FORGET OUR BARGAIN! ROM'S ARMOR IS MINE! I DO NOT WANT IT DEFILED!
DELIVER UNTO US OUR ENEMY, QUASIMODO--
--AND YOU SHALL LIVE AGAIN!


LIFE! THAT WAS ALL QUASIMODO HAD EVER CRAVED FROM THE DAY OF HIS CREATION AT THE HANDS OF THE MAD THINKER!*
*SEE FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL # 4 --RALPH.


THE SILVER SURFER USED HIS POWER COSMIC TO GRANT THE LIVING COMPUTER HIS DESIRE!* QUASIMODO LIVED ALTHOUGH HE EXISTED IN A BRUTISH, HULKING FORM.
*FF ANNUAL # 5 --RALPH.
HE WOULD FIGHT ALL THE WORLD TO STAY ALIVE!

AND, INDEED, AT TIMES IT SEEMED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO!


HOWEVER, FLIGHT SEEMED SAFER THAN FIGHTING! SENSING A GREAT COMPUTER INTELLIGENCE IN SPACE, QUASIMODO STOLE A SPACECRAFT FROM THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND ROCKETED TOWARDS IT!*
*FF #202--RALPH: SIGH:


THE COMPUTERS HE'D DETECTED WERE THE LIVING COMPUTERS OF XANDAR! QUASIMODO NEVER REACHED THAT WORLD!
HE WAS INTERCEPTED BY THE ALL-POWERFUL SPHINX, IMMOBILIZED...

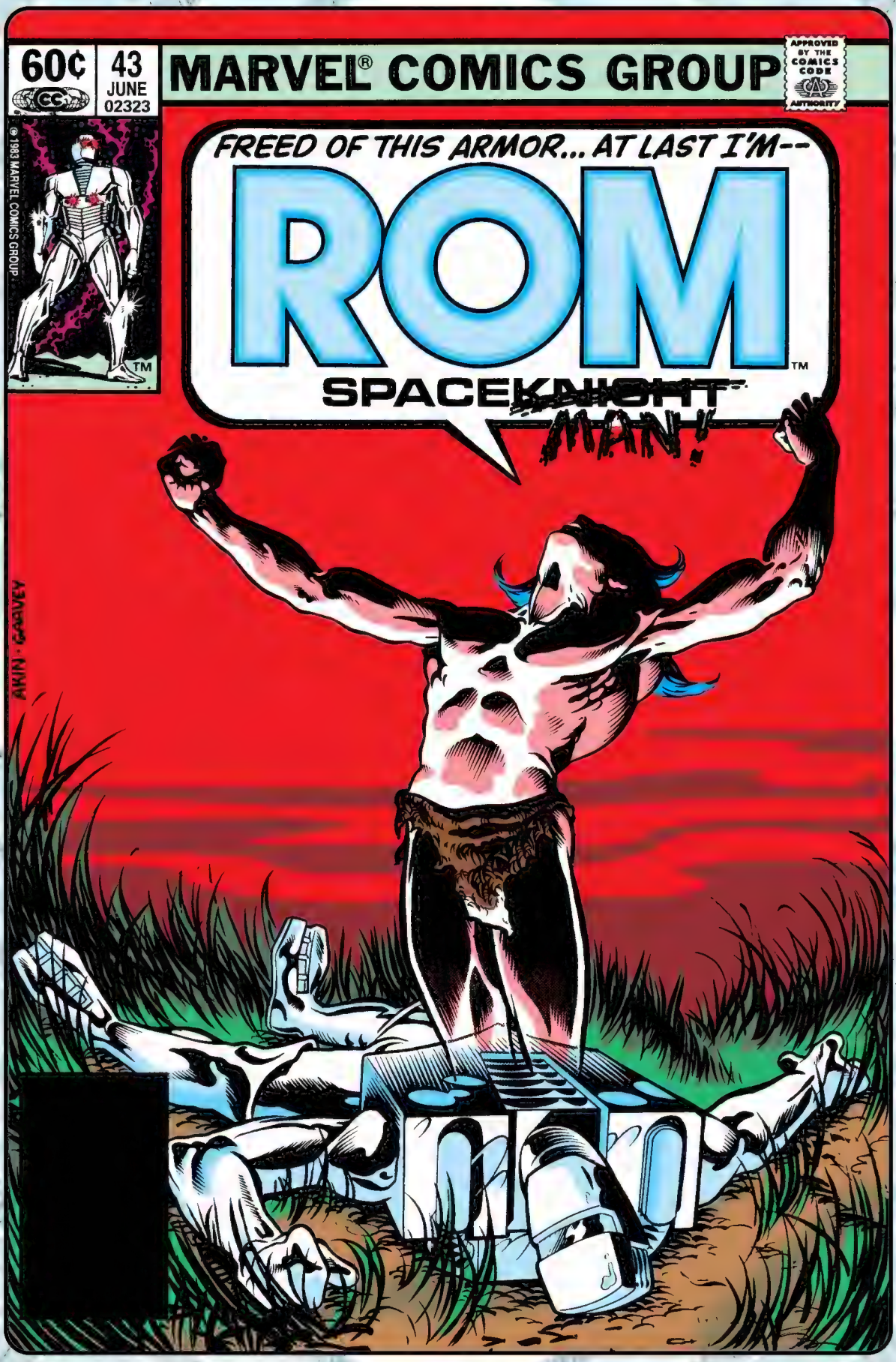
...AND MY MIND WAS DRIVEN AGAIN INTO THE ETHER, UNTIL I DISCOVERED THESE ABANDONED COMPUTER BANKS IN KHYSTYM! *
*ABANDONED AFTER THE EVENTS IN THE INCREDIBLE HULK #259--YOU KNOW.
AND HERE, YOU ALSO FOUND US! MANKIND SOUGHT TO USE THIS COMPLEX AS A CENTER FOR OUR EVIL ACTIVITIES!
YOU ALLIED YOURSELF WITH US, QUASIMODO!
YES! I SWORE TO DESTROY THE SPACE-KNIGHT--YOUR GREATEST ENEMY--IF HIS ARMOR COULD BE MINE!
ANIMATING IT, I WILL BE MOBILE AGAIN!
AND WHILE THAT MAY NOT BE LIFE AS I TRULY DESIRE...TO QUASIMODO, HALF A LIFE IS BETTER THAN NONE!
THE NEEDLE DESCENDS!
A CELL IS EXTRACTED!
THE PROCESS IS BEGUN!

THE SPACEKNIGHT SLEEPS, UNAWARE.
SWEET SLUMBERS, ROM OF GALADOR!
WHEN YOU AWAKE, YOUR DREAM WILL HAVE BEEN REALIZED!
HOWEVER, YOUR DREAM WILL HAVE BECOME--A NIGHTMARE!

ROM AWAKES.
I FEEL!
I FEEL!
SKIN INSTEAD OF SPACEKNIGHT STEEL!
I'M A MAN AGAIN!
HUMAN!
HIS JOY KNOWS NO BOUNDS.
AND, AS HE MAKES HIS WAY OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF THE SUBTERRANEAN COMPLEX, HE CRIES HIS GRATITUDE BACK TO THE SHADOWS.
THANK YOU, QUASIMODO! THANK YOU, WHEREVER YOU ARE!

HIS GRATITUDE, IT SEEMS, IS SOMEWHAT PREMATURE
DON'T THANK ME SPACEKNIGHT. THE WORST IS YET TO COME!
THE SHINING ARMOR IS THAT OF ROM, GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS, THOUGH THE VOICE EMITTING FROM IT IS COLDER, EVEN MORE MACHINE-LIKE.
ROM MAY BE A MAN AGAIN, BUT QUASIMODO -- THE LIVING COMPUTER -- OCCUPIES ROM'S SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR... AND BESIDE HIM STANDS WRAITHKIND ASSEMBLED!

NEXT MONTH **ROM -- SPACEKNIGHT MAN!**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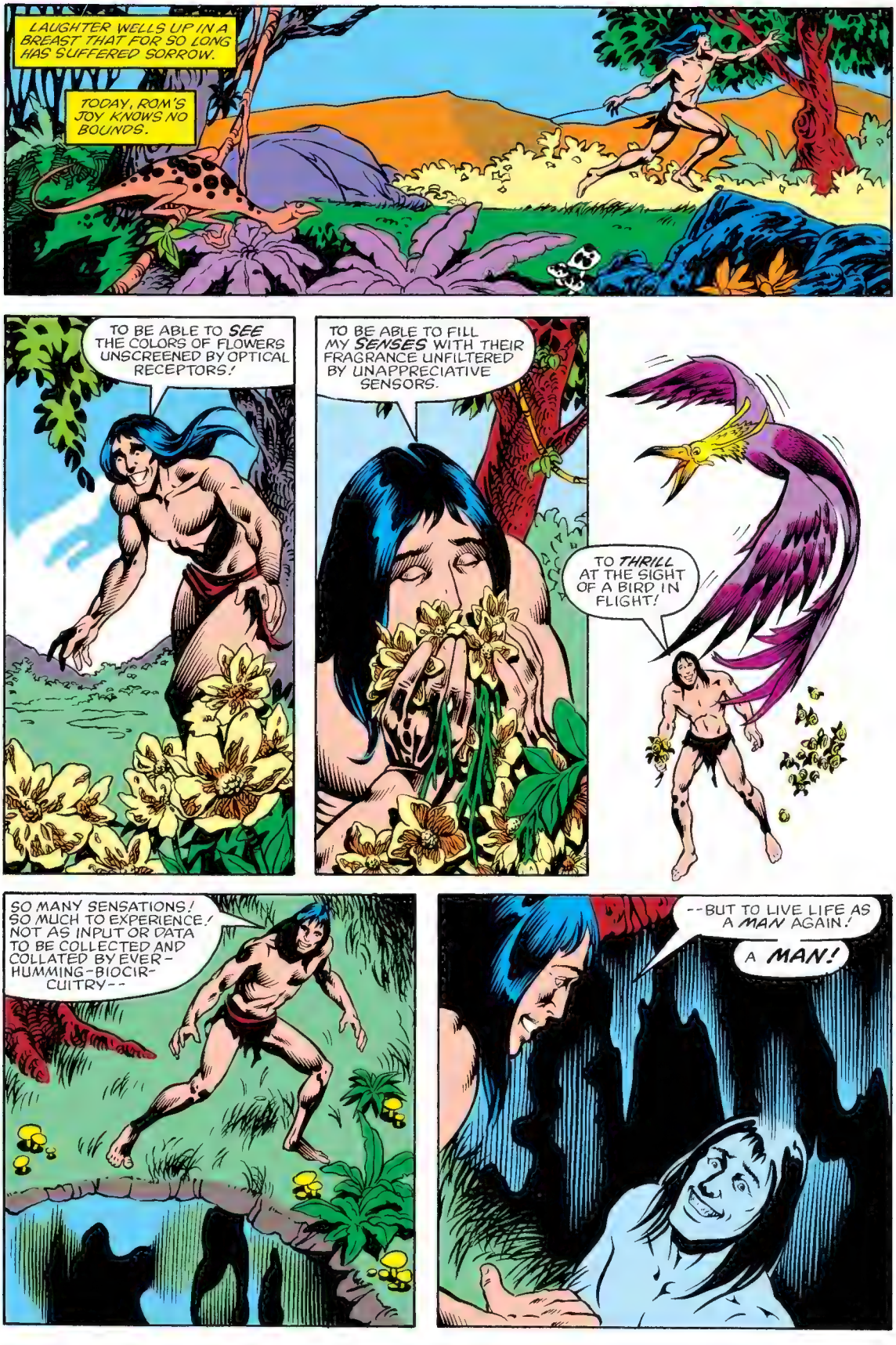
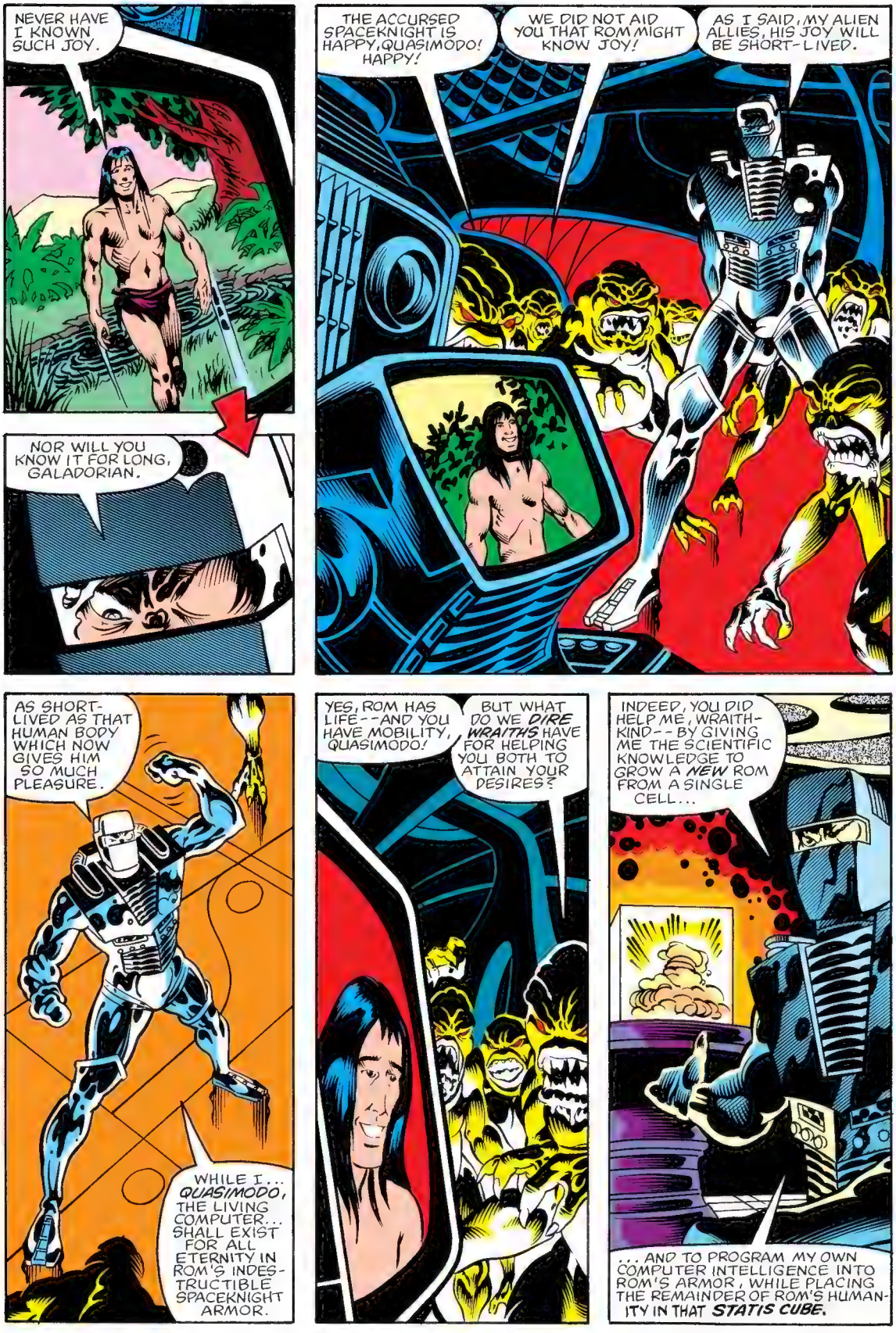
FREED OF THIS ARMOR... AT LAST I'M--
ROM
SPACEKNIGHT
MAN!
AKIN · GARVEY

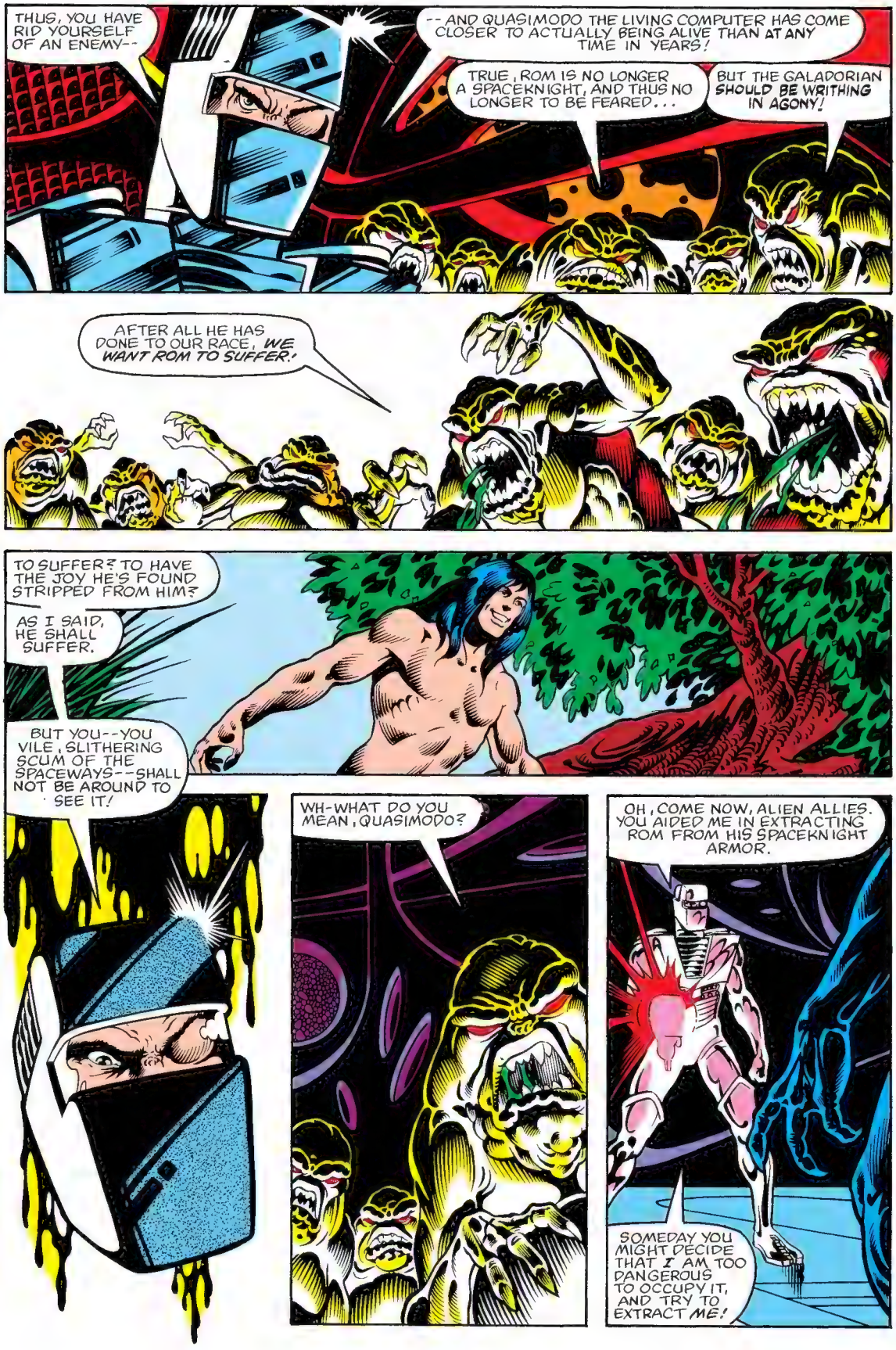
Stan Lee PRESENTS:

ROM--SPACEKNIGHT
MAN
FOR ROM, SON OF THE DISTANT WORLD GALADOR, THIS IMPOSSIBLY PEACEFUL CORNER OF THE SOVIET UNION IS NOTHING SHORT OF... PARADISE.
FOR IT WAS HERE THAT HE REGAINED HIS LOST HUMANITY.
I LIVE! I FEEL! I'M A MAN AGAIN!
ALIVE!
BILL MANTLO STORY • SAL BUSCEMA PENCILS • AKIN & GARVEY INKS • JANICE CHIANG LETTERS • BEN SEAN COLORS • RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR • JIM SHOOTER CHIEF


LAUGHTER WELLS UP IN A BREAST THAT FOR SO LONG HAS SUFFERED SORROW.
TODAY, ROM'S JOY KNOWS NO BOUNDS.
TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE COLORS OF FLOWERS UNSCREENED BY OPTICAL RECEPTORS!
TO BE ABLE TO FILL MY SENSES WITH THEIR FRAGRANCE UNFILTERED BY UNAPPRECIATIVE SENSORS.
TO THRILL AT THE SIGHT OF A BIRD IN FLIGHT!
SO MANY SENSATIONS! SO MUCH TO EXPERIENCE! NOT AS INPUT OR DATA TO BE COLLECTED AND COLLATED BY EVER-HUMMING-BIOCIR-CUITRY--
--BUT TO LIVE LIFE AS A MAN AGAIN!
A MAN!

TENTATIVELY, ROM REACHES OUT, AS IF AFRAID THE IMAGE WILL DISAPPEAR.
IT DOES. . . TO BE REPLACED IN HIS MIND'S EYE BY THE IMAGE OF ANOTHER.
BRANDY!
NOTHING RESTRAINS HIM, THEN. NOTHING HOLDS HIM BACK.
HE LIVES.
HE ACCEPTS LIFE.
HE IMMERSES HIMSELF IN IT.
AND HE STRIDES FORTH FROM THE WATERS, BORN AGAIN, BODY AND SPIRIT.


NEVER HAVE I KNOWN SUCH JOY.
NOR WILL YOU KNOW IT FOR LONG, GALADORIAN.
THE ACCURSED SPACEKNIGHT IS HAPPY, QUASIMODO! HAPPY!
WE DID NOT AID YOU THAT ROM MIGHT KNOW JOY!
AS I SAID, MY ALIEN ALLIES, HIS JOY WILL BE SHORT-LIVED.
AS SHORT-LIVED AS THAT HUMAN BODY WHICH NOW GIVES HIM SO MUCH PLEASURE.
WHILE I... QUASIMODO, THE LIVING COMPUTER... SHALL EXIST FOR ALL ETERNITY IN ROM'S INDESTRUCTIBLE SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR.
YES, ROM HAS LIFE--AND YOU HAVE MOBILITY, QUASIMODO!
BUT WHAT DO WE DIRE WRAITHS HAVE FOR HELPING YOU BOTH TO ATTAIN YOUR DESIRES?
INDEED, YOU DID HELP ME, WRAITH-KIND--BY GIVING ME THE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE TO GROW A NEW ROM FROM A SINGLE CELL...
...AND TO PROGRAM MY OWN COMPUTER INTELLIGENCE INTO ROM'S ARMOR, WHILE PLACING THE REMAINDER OF ROM'S HUMANITY IN THAT STATIS CUBE.


THUS, YOU HAVE RID YOURSELF OF AN ENEMY--
--AND QUASIMODO THE LIVING COMPUTER HAS COME CLOSER TO ACTUALLY BEING ALIVE THAN AT ANY TIME IN YEARS!
TRUE, ROM IS NO LONGER A SPACEKNIGHT, AND THUS NO LONGER TO BE FEARED...
BUT THE GALADORIAN SHOULD BE WRITHING IN AGONY!
AFTER ALL HE HAS DONE TO OUR RACE, WE WANT ROM TO SUFFER!
TO SUFFER? TO HAVE THE JOY HE'S FOUND STRIPPED FROM HIM?
AS I SAID, HE SHALL SUFFER.
BUT YOU--YOU VILE, SLITHERING SCUM OF THE SPACEWAYS--SHALL NOT BE AROUND TO SEE IT!
WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN, QUASIMODO?
OH, COME NOW, ALIEN ALLIES. YOU AIDED ME IN EXTRACTING ROM FROM HIS SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR.
SOMEDAY YOU MIGHT DECIDE THAT I AM TOO DANGEROUS TO OCCUPY IT, AND TRY TO EXTRACT ME!

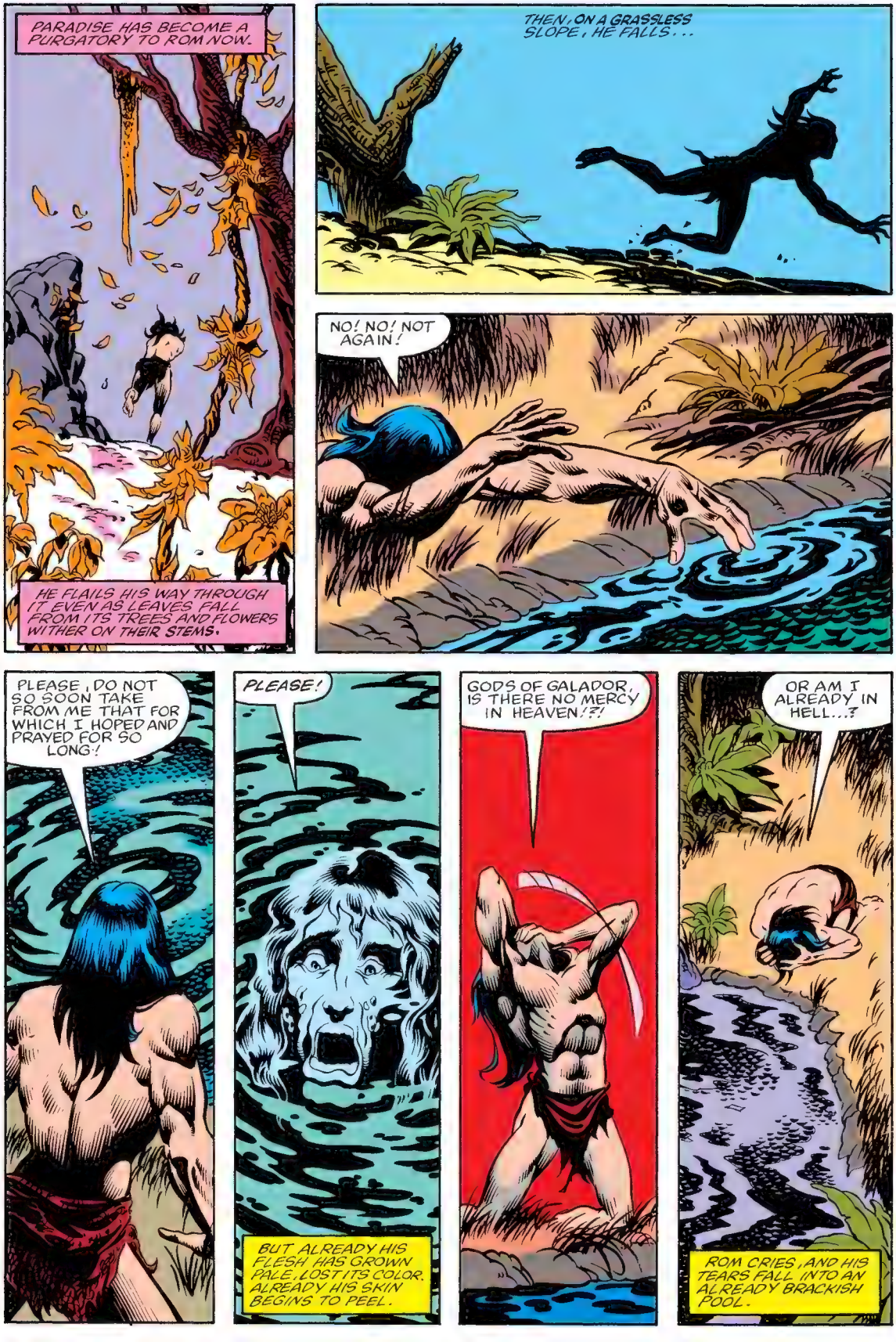
AND, HAVING AT LAST FOUND LIFE OF A SORT AGAIN, QUASIMODO WILL TAKE NO CHANCES ON EVER LOSING IT.
VREEEEEE
MATERIALIZED OUT OF SUBSPACE, ROM'S NEUTRALIZER SINGS A SHRILL AND SIBILANT SONG...
...OPENING A PORTAL IN SPACE THROUGH WHICH SCREAMING WRAITH-KIND FALLS INTO LIMBO.
TRULY DISGUSTING CREATURES--DESERVING OF DEATH.
NOW NOTHING CAN HARM QUASIMODO--SPACEKNIGHT!
NOTHING, COMPUTER? CAST YOUR GAZE BEHIND YOU.

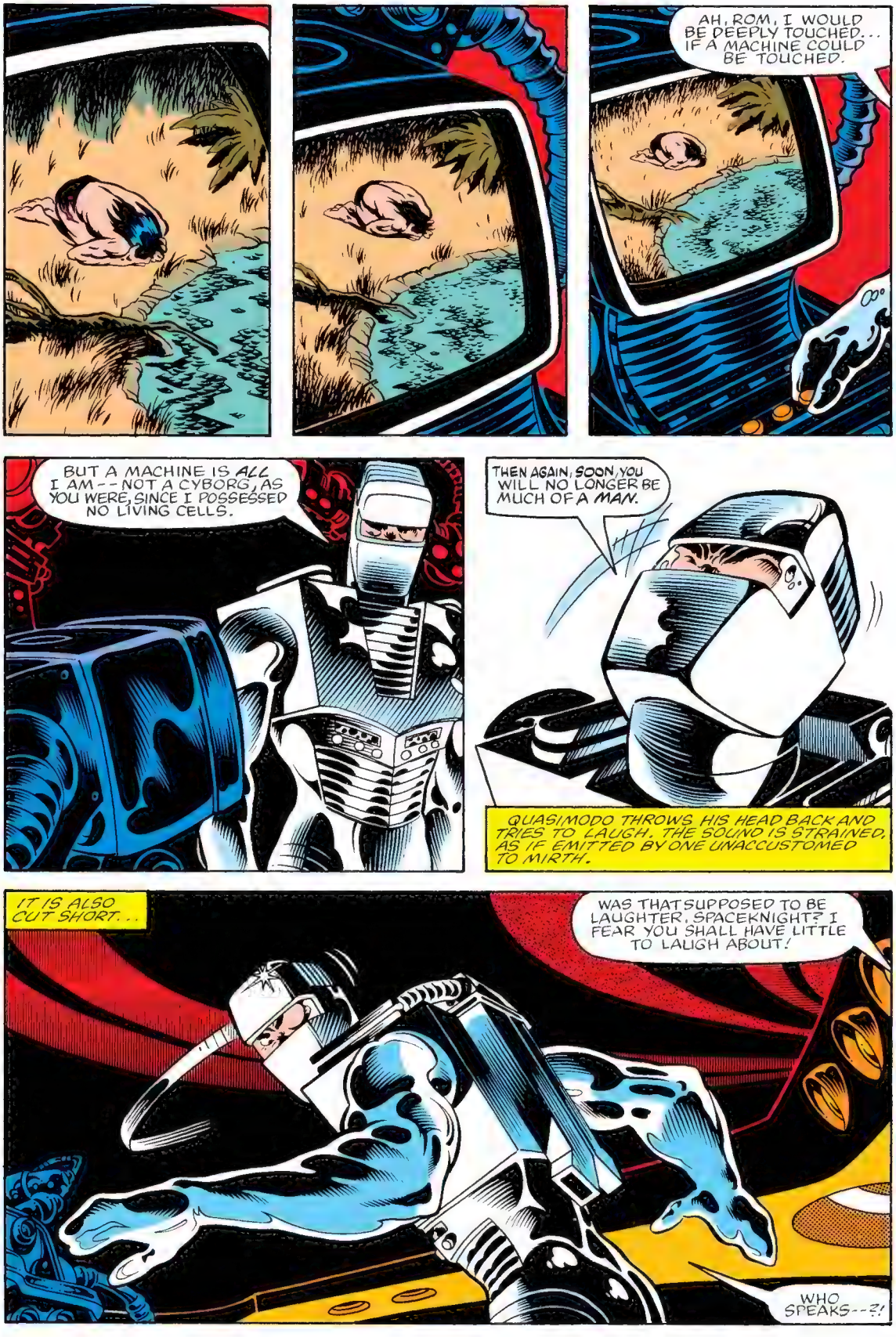
MEANWHILE, AN EXUBERANT ROM PROCEEDS THROUGH PARADISE, UNAWARE OF THE IMPENDING DOOM ABOUT TO BEFALL HIM...
BRANDY.
MY GREATEST DESIRE IS TO SEE HER AGAIN--TO ENFOLD HER IN MY HUMAN ARMS...
...TO DECLARE THE LOVE WHICH I HAD TO SUPPRESS SO LONG AS I WAS HELD HOSTAGE WITHIN SPACE-KNIGHT ARMOR.
BUT... WILL SHE LOVE ME IN RETURN?
AND WHAT OF STEVE JACKSON... MY FRIEND? HE TOO, LOVES BRANDY CLARK.
THEN THERE IS THE WRAITH WAR! I CAME TO EARTH TO CLEANSE IT OF WRAITHKIND, TO AWAKEN EARTH'S POPULATION TO THEIR DANGER!
AM I NOT ABANDONING THOSE I CAME TO SAVE--ABDICATING MY TRUST--BY NOT CARRYING ON THE BATTLE?

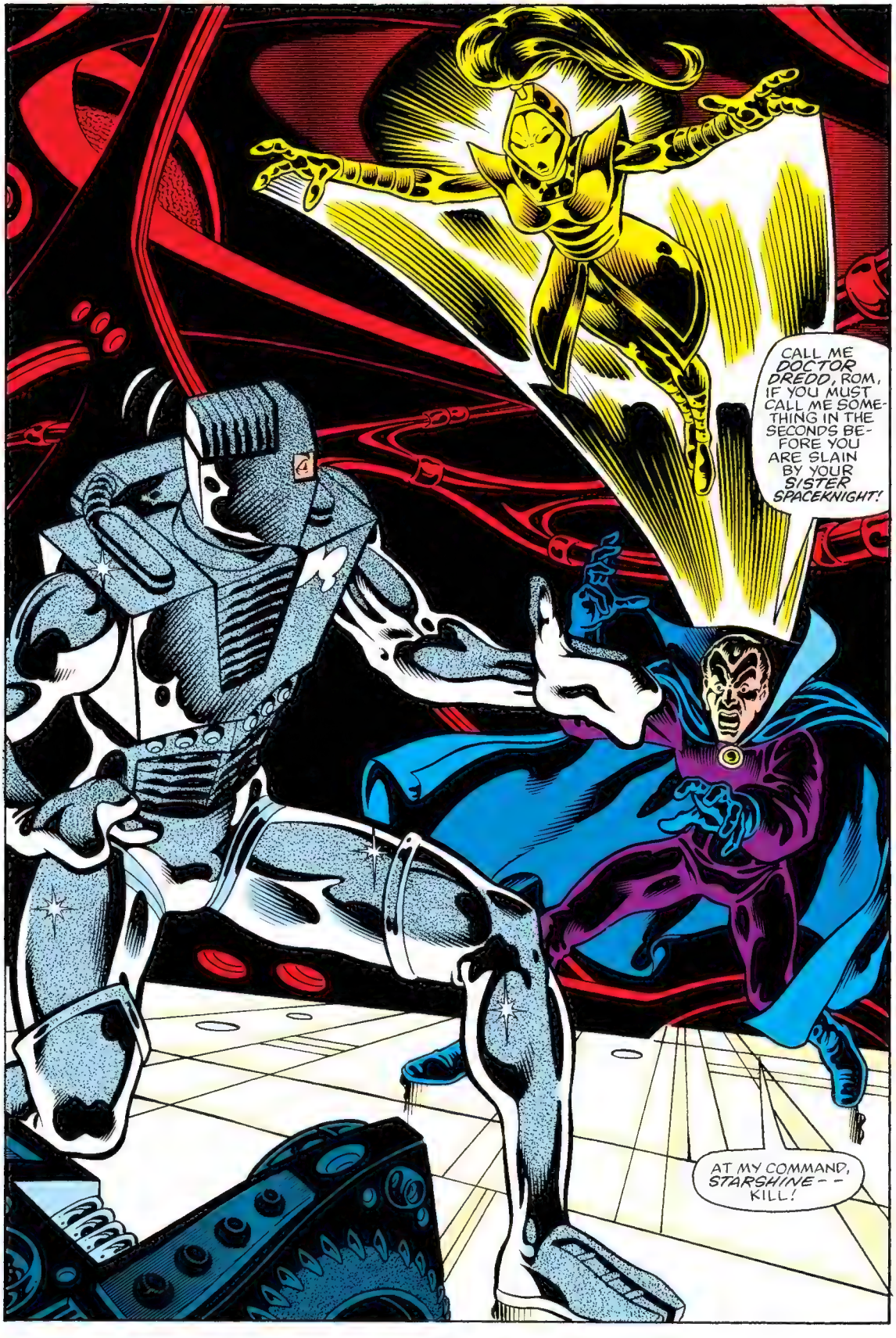
NO!
I HAVE FOUGHT LONG AND HARD AND ALONE FOR TWO HUNDRED YEARS!
THERE ARE OTHER SPACEKNIGHTS IN THE HEAVENS! EARTH HAS HEROES OF ITS OWN AWARE OF WRAITHKIND'S PRESENCE!
LET THEM CARRY ON THE QUEST! I... I WOULD REST--
--AND GROW ACCUSTOMED TO BEING HUMAN AGAIN!
WEARILY, ROM PRESSES ON...
...UNTIL THE BEAUTY OF PARADISE REVIVES HIS FLAGGING SPIRITS.
IT IS BEAUTIFUL!
WHAT AN ARCHITECT QUASIMODO IS TO HAVE CRAFTED THIS GARDEN FROM THE ASHES OF A NUCLEAR DEVASTATION--
--AND TO HAVE GRANTED NEW LIFE TO ITS...
...VICTIMS?
HE STOPS. HE SEES. HIS BLOOD RUNS COLD IN HIS VEINS.

THE CHILDREN! THE CHILDREN OF PARADISE! BY GALADOR'S GOLDEN GATES, WHAT ATROCITY HAS O'ERTAKEN THEM!?!
SAVE US, YOU WHO SEEM TO HAVE SAVED YOURSELF!
SAVE YOU? FROM WHAT? WHAT IS HAPPENING TO YOU--
"-- WHO WERE SO FULL OF LIFE WHEN FIRST I STEPPED FOOT IN PARADISE?!"
BY THE GOLDEN GALAXY, WHAT IS GOING WRONG!?!

WE TOLD YOU... WE ARE THE DEAD! THOUGH HE WHO HEALED US SAID HE GAVE US LIFE AGAIN... HE LIED!
QUASIMODO... LIED?!
YES! HE COULD NOT REVERSE THE IRREVERSIBLE... ONLY DELAY IT!
THE PROCESS WAS TEMPORARY!
NOW WE DIE A SECOND TIME! WE DIE FOR REAL!
NO! I-IF THIS IS HAPPENING TO YOU--
--THEN WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME!?!
ROM RUNS...
...AS IF THERE WERE ANYWHERE THAT HE COULD RUN FROM THE TRUTH.

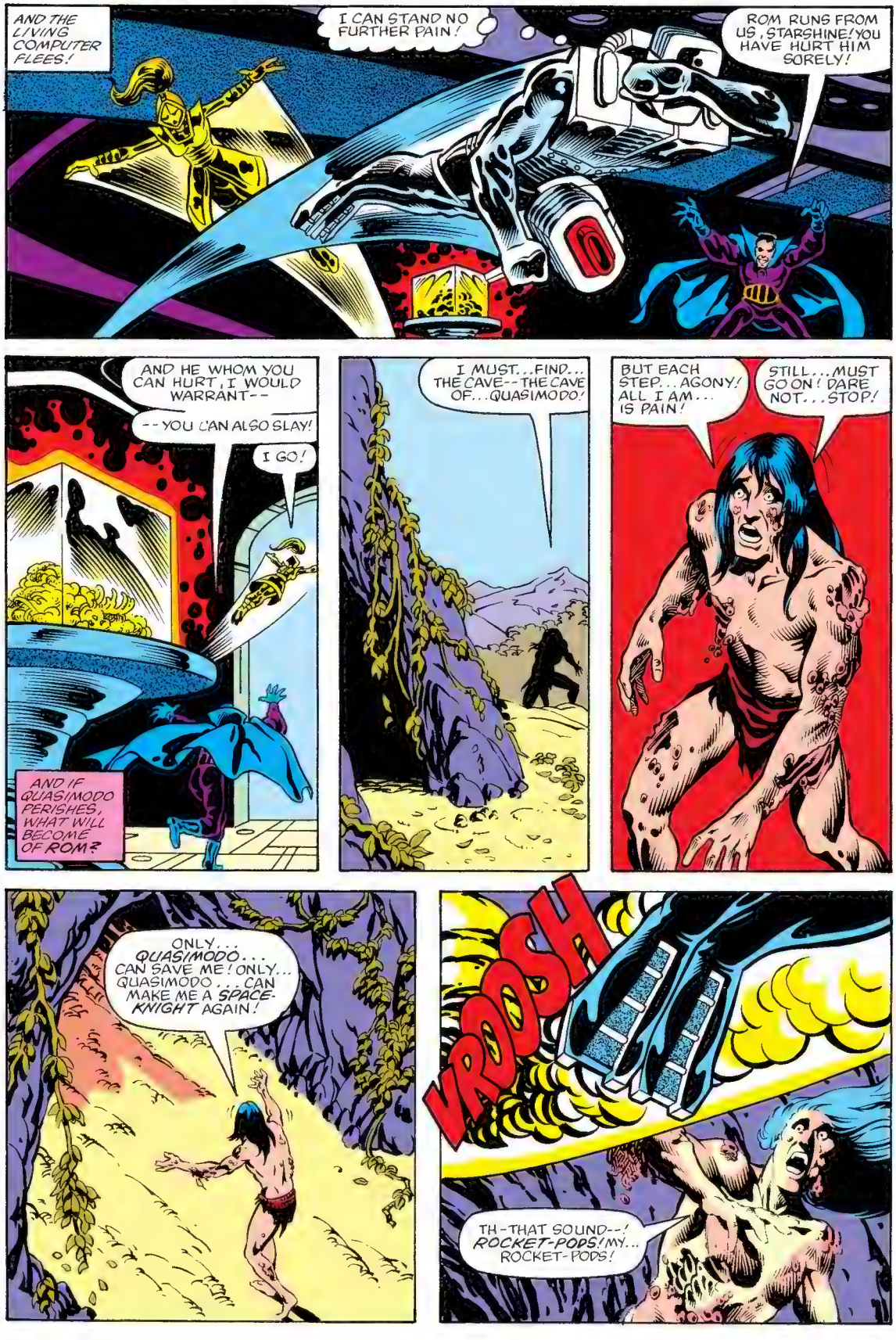

PARADISE HAS BECOME A PURGATORY TO ROM NOW.
HE FLAILS HIS WAY THROUGH IT EVEN AS LEAVES FALL FROM ITS TREES AND FLOWERS WITHER ON THEIR STEMS.
THEN, ON A GRASSLESS SLOPE, HE FALLS...
NO! NO! NOT AGAIN!
PLEASE, DO NOT SO SOON TAKE FROM ME THAT FOR WHICH I HOPED AND PRAYED FOR SO LONG!
PLEASE!
BUT ALREADY HIS FLESH HAS GROWN PALE, LOST ITS COLOR. ALREADY HIS SKIN BEGINS TO PEEL.
GODS OF GALADOR, IS THERE NO MERCY IN HEAVEN!?!
OR AM I ALREADY IN HELL...?
ROM CRIES, AND HIS TEARS FALL INTO AN ALREADY BRACKISH POOL.


AH, ROM, I WOULD BE DEEPLY TOUCHED... IF A MACHINE COULD BE TOUCHED.
BUT A MACHINE IS ALL I AM--NOT A CYBORG, AS YOU WERE, SINCE I POSSESSED NO LIVING CELLS.
THEN AGAIN, SOON YOU WILL NO LONGER BE MUCH OF A MAN.
QUASIMODO THROWS HIS HEAD BACK AND TRIES TO LAUGH. THE SOUND IS STRAINED, AS IF EMITTED BY ONE UNACCUSTOMED TO MIRTH.
IT IS ALSO CUT SHORT...
WAS THAT SUPPOSED TO BE LAUGHTER, SPACEKNIGHT? I FEAR YOU SHALL HAVE LITTLE TO LAUGH ABOUT!
WHO SPEAKS--?!


CALL ME DOCTOR DREDD, ROM, IF YOU MUST CALL ME SOMETHING IN THE SECONDS BEFORE YOU ARE SLAIN BY YOUR SISTER SPACEKNIGHT!
AT MY COMMAND, STARSHINE -- KILL!

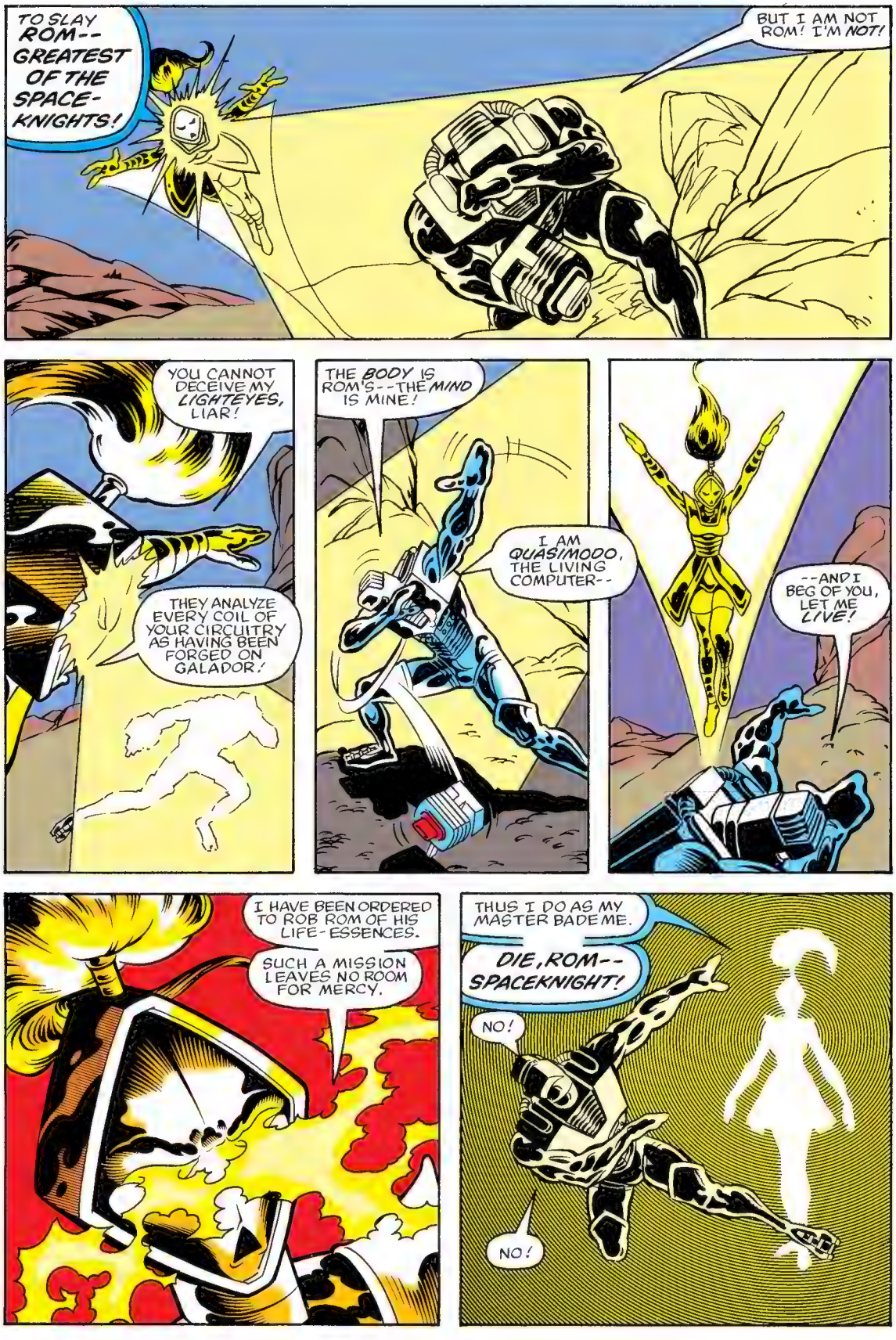
IT SHALL BE AS YOU COMMAND, DOCTOR DREDD!
THEN LET YOUR LETHAL LIGHTEYES MERGE WITH MY WRAITH MAGIC--
--TO SLAY THE SPACEKNIGHT WHERE HE STANDS!
ARRGHH!
YOU... HAVE HURT ME!
DO YOU HEAR, STARSHINE! OUR COMBINED POWER HAS CAUSED HARM TO THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
IT WAS FOR THIS MOMENT THAT I USED MY WARLOCK'S POWER--
--TO MAGICALLY MERGE AN EARTH HUMAN, BRANDY CLARK, WITH THE EMPTY ARMOR OF THE SLAIN STARSHINE!
NEITHER THE GIRL NOR I ARE ACTUAL SPACE-KNIGHTS!
WE ARE BOTH EARTH INSTRUMENTS OF THE WRAITHS!
THE WRAITHS COULD TELL DREDD THAT... BUT I BANISHED THEM TO LIMBO!
LIMBO?

SO LONG AS I POSSESS ROM'S NEUTRALIZER, I NEED NOT COWER HELPLESSLY!
ROM SUMMONS HIS WEAPON, STARSHINE! WILL SPACEKNIGHT SLAY SPACEKNIGHT?
I THINK NOT! OUR ADVANTAGE LIES IN THE FACT THAT ROM LOVES YOU--
--AND THE NOBLE GALADORIAN WOULD NEVER HARM THE WOMAN HE LOVES!
YOU KNOW ME NOT AT ALL THEN, WRAITH--
--FOR I WOULD SLAY ANYONE TO LIVE!
VREEEEEE
OOHHH!
BY THE BLACK NEBULA--WAS I WRONG ABOUT ROM? THAT THE EARTHWOMAN LOVES HIM, I AM SURE! CAN IT BE HE DOES NOT LOVE HER AS I THOUGHT?
IF SO, OUR ADVANTAGE IS HALVED! BUT STARSHINE STILL POSSESSES POWER!
RISE, MY GOLDEN GLADIATRIX! RISE AND STRIKE AT HE WHO HAS HURT YOU!
I RISE!
I STRIKE!
ARRGHHH!
PAINFUL BRILLIANCE CUTS THROUGH TO QUASIMODO'S CIRCUITRIZED SOUL... IF SOUL IT IS.


AND THE LIVING COMPUTER FLEES!
I CAN STAND NO FURTHER PAIN!
ROM RUNS FROM US, STARSHINE! YOU HAVE HURT HIM SORELY!
AND HE WHOM YOU CAN HURT, I WOULD WARRANT--
--YOU CAN ALSO SLAY!
I GO!
AND IF QUASIMODO PERISHES, WHAT WILL BECOME OF ROM?
I MUST...FIND... THE CAVE--THE CAVE OF...QUASIMODO!
BUT EACH STEP...AGONY! ALL I AM... IS PAIN!
STILL...MUST GO ON! DARE NOT...STOP!
ONLY... QUASIMODO... CAN SAVE ME! ONLY... QUASIMODO... CAN MAKE ME A SPACE-KNIGHT AGAIN!
VROOSH
TH-THAT SOUND--! ROCKET-PODS! MY... ROCKET-PODS!

WHO--?
OF COURSE! QUASIMODO... HAS STOLEN... MY SPACE-KNIGHT ARMOR! THAT'S WHY... HE WAS... SO EAGER TO... HELP ME!
NOW HE... LIVES-- EVEN AS I... DIE! BUT THE REMAINDER OF... MY HUMANITY--
--DOES IT STILL EXIST... WITHIN THE CAVE?!?
ROM IS ABOUT TO STAGGER IN WHEN A BURST OF UNEARTHLY BRILLIANCE SEARS HIS EYES AND DRIVES HIM BACK.
STARSHINE!
BUT STARSHINE IS... DEAD!
STARSHINE DIED... BUT I FILLED HER EMPTY ARMOR WITH THE HUMANITY OF AN ENTRANCED EARTHLING--
--WHO WILL NOW SERVE ME WELL BY SLAYING ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
ASIDE, WITLESS HUMAN! THE MOMENT OF DOCTOR DREDD'S TRIUMPH IS NIGH!
I DON'T NEED MY ENERGY ANALYZER TO DETECT THAT DREDD IS A WRAITH!
NOW THAT I'M HUMAN, I CAN SMELL THEIR VILE KIND.

BUT WHAT DID DREDD MEAN ABOUT A HUMAN BEING INSIDE STARSHINE'S ARMOR?
WHICH HUMAN?!?
THOUGH EVERY MOVE HE MAKES SENDS WAVES OF PAIN THROUGH HIS RAPIDLY DETERIORATING MUSCLES AND NERVES...
..HIS NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE NEVERTHELESS DRIVES ROM TO LEAP AT DOCTOR DREDD!
WRAITH WARLOCK-- I KNOW YOU...FOR WHAT YOU ARE!
NOW WOULD I KNOW MORE...ABOUT WHAT IT IS YOU HAVE... DONE!
SPEAK, OR I'LL... WRENCH YOUR HEAD FROM YOUR NECK!
AGGLKK! I... HAVE ALREADY TOLD YOU-- I TOOK A HUMAN WHO LOVED ROM... AND TURNED HER INTO AN INSTRUMENT OF HIS DESTRUCTION!
WHO.. LOVED ME?
BRANDY!
WHO ARE YOU, YOU MASS OF MORTIFYING FLESH, THAT YOU KNOW THE FEMALE'S NAME?
ROM!
AYE, WRAITH-- YOU'VE JUST NAMED YOUR EXECUTIONER!
MEANWHILE, THE STELLAR SPACEKNIGHT SOARS SWIFTLY IN THE WAKE OF QUASIMODO...
I COME, ROM, TO DO AS DREDD COMMANDS ME!


TO SLAY ROM-- GREATEST OF THE SPACE-KNIGHTS!
BUT I AM NOT ROM! I'M NOT!
YOU CANNOT DECEIVE MY LIGHTEYES, LIAR!
THEY ANALYZE EVERY COIL OF YOUR CIRCUITRY AS HAVING BEEN FORGED ON GALADOR!
THE BODY IS ROM'S--THE MIND IS MINE!
I AM QUASIMODO, THE LIVING COMPUTER--
--AND I BEG OF YOU, LET ME LIVE!
I HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO ROB ROM OF HIS LIFE-ESSENCES.
SUCH A MISSION LEAVES NO ROOM FOR MERCY.
THUS I DO AS MY MASTER BADE ME.
DIE, ROM-- SPACEKNIGHT!
NO!
NO!

NO!!!
SOMETHING FLOATS FREE FROM THE STAGGERING SPACE-KNIGHT ARMOR...
SOMETHING SENTIENT BUT ETHEREAL, MIND WITHOUT MATTER.
SOMETHING THAT IS PICKED UP BY A PASSING BREEZE...
...AND BLOWN AWAY.
ROM IS DEAD.
OH, MY GOD! WHAT HAVE I DONE!?!
HER MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, HER ENCHANTMENT COMES TO AN END...
...AND BRANDY CLARK TAKES TO THE SKY, OVERCOME BY GRIEF.
I-I'VE SLAIN THE MAN I LOVE!

DOCTOR DREDD MADE ME SLAY ROM, AND FOR THAT HE WILL PAY!
BUT THERE IS ANOTHER ALREADY EXACTING RETRIBUTION FROM THE WRAITH WARLOCK!
YOU'RE GOING TO... DIE, DREDD! I'M...GOING TO KILL YOU!
ARE YOU, ROM? YOU FORGET, I AM A WRAITH--
--ABLE TO ASSUME ANY SHAPE, HOWEVER VILE!
TRANSFORM HOWEVER YOU WISH, WRAITH-- STILL... WILL I HOLD ON! YOU SEE... I AM DYING! I... CAN SUFFER NO WORSE THAN THAT!
GGLLKKK!
WHO IS IT THAT SEEKS TO SLAY DREDD--
--DEPRIVING ME OF MY REVENGE!
EVEN WORSE... SHALL BE YOUR PUNISH-MENT, WRAITH, BECAUSE BRANDY HAS SEEN ME...IN THIS SORRY STATE!
TH-THE HUMAN--IF SUCH THAT DECOMPOSING CREATURE CAN BE SAID TO BE--IS KILLING DOCTOR DREDD!
YES!
HISSSSSS!

YES.
SSSHHSSSS
I WANTED TO PUNISH DREDD FOR FORCING ME TO SLAY THE MAN I LOVED!
WHO ARE YOU, THAT YOU HATED HIM ENOUGH TO KILL?
BRANDY, CAN IT BE... YOU DO NOT KNOW ME?
IT ISN'T HIS VOICE THAT IDENTIFIES HIM... THE SOUNDS HE MAKES ARE HARSH AND CROAKING. PERHAPS, THEN, IT IS HIS SOUL REFLECTED THROUGH HIS EYES...
LORD IN HEAVEN, IT--IT CAN'T BE! ROM?
ROM!
...WHICH FINDS ITS MIRROR IMAGE IN BRANDY CLARK'S OWN SPIRIT.
OH, MY POOR LOST LOVE!
NEXT MONTH:
REBIRTH!
PLUS THE RETURN OF DEVASTATOR!

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TM
ROM
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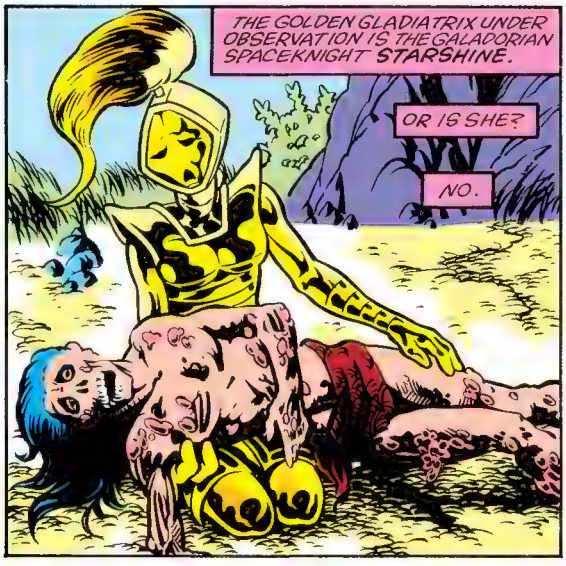
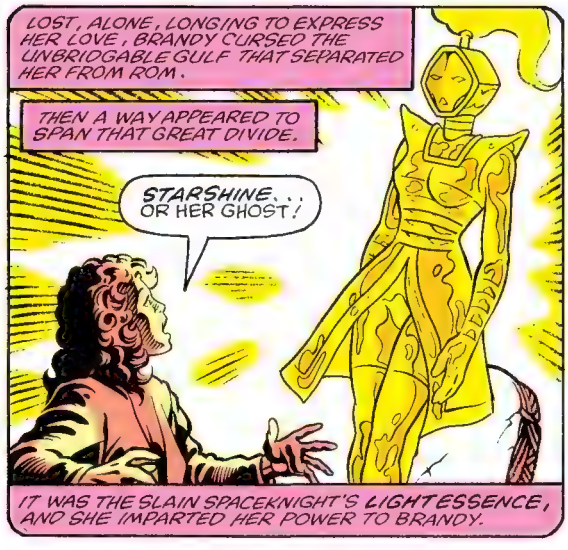
AKIN & GARVEY

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO STORY
SAL BUSCEMA LAYOUTS
AKIN & GARVEY EMBELLISHMENT
JANICE CHIANG LETTERS
BEN SEAN COLORS
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO!
IN THE LONELY KHYSTYM REGION OF THE SOVIET UNION, THREE FIGURES SIT FROZEN IN A TIMELESS TABLEAUX OF GRIEF.
BUT IT IS SAID THAT MOSCOW DOES NOT BELIEVE IN TEARS; NOR DOES THE SOVIET MILITARY MIND INTRUDING ON A SPACE-KNIGHT'S MOURNING.


THE GOLDEN GLADIATRIX UNDER OBSERVATION IS THE GALADORIAN SPACEKNIGHT STARSHINE.
OR IS SHE?
NO.

SHE IS A WOMAN OF EARTH... BRANDY CLARK OF CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA.
THE FIRST HUMAN TO SET EYES ON THE ALIEN ROM, SHE WAS ALSO THE FIRST TO BEFRIEND HIM...
... AND THE FIRST TO LOVE THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT.
HAVING CLEANSED HER COMMUNITY OF WRAITHKIND, ROM DEPARTED... NOT DARING TO LOVE A HUMAN.


LOST, ALONE, LONGING TO EXPRESS HER LOVE, BRANDY CURSED THE UNBRIDGABLE GULF THAT SEPARATED HER FROM ROM.
THEN A WAY APPEARED TO SPAN THAT GREAT DIVIDE.
STARSHINE... OR HER GHOST!
IT WAS THE SLAIN SPACEKNIGHT'S LIGHT ESSENCE, AND SHE IMPARTED HER POWER TO BRANDY.

ACTING ALMOST ENTRANCED, BRANDY DISINTERRED STARSHINE'S EMPTY ARMOR, AND DRAGGED IT TO TO THE LAB WHERE SHE WORKED.
TO LOVE ROM, I MUST BECOME LIKE ROM.
BUT HOW? HOW?

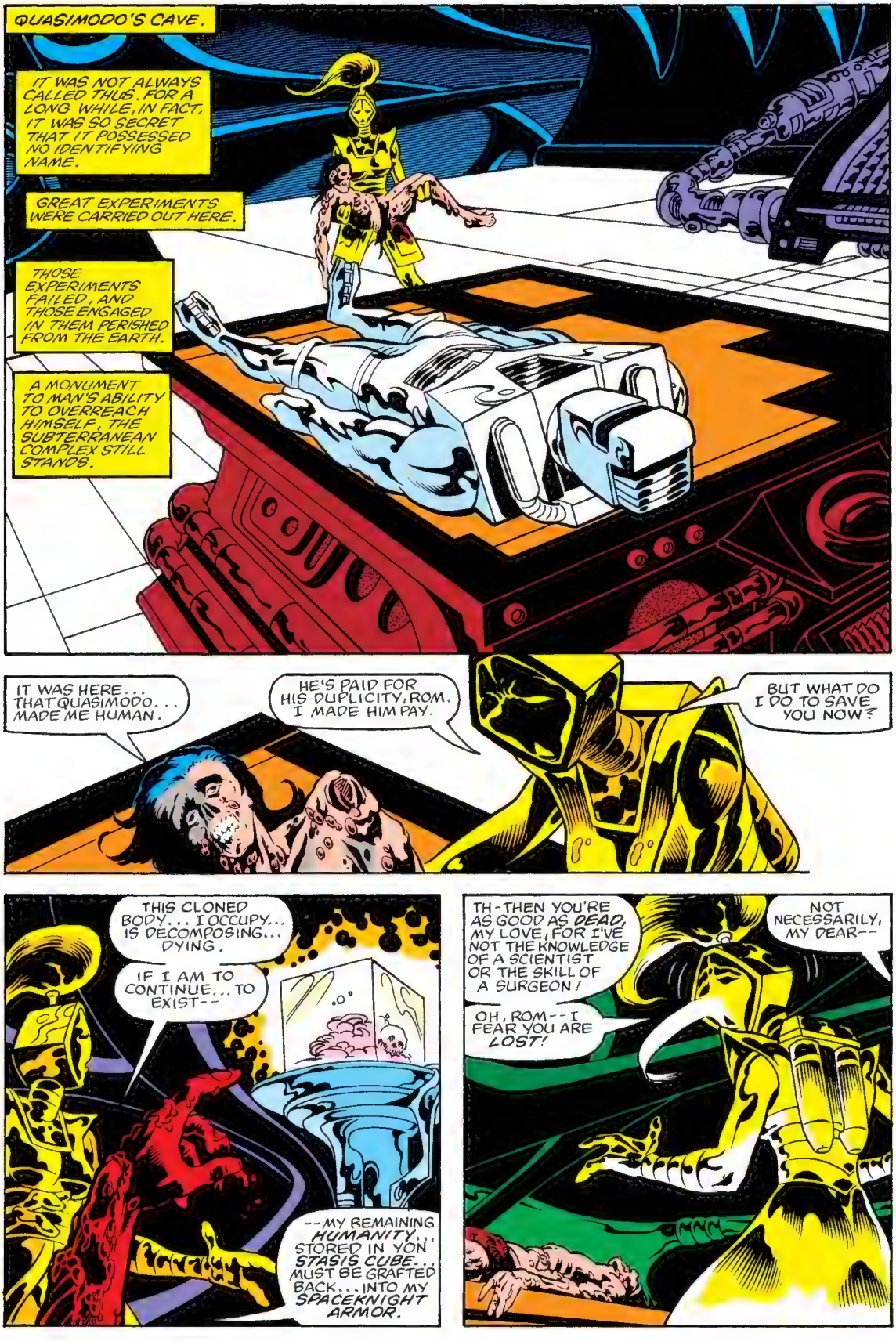
SHE NEVER QUESTIONED HOW THE MAGICIAN HEARD HER... OR THAT HE RESPONDED TO HER PLAINT. SOMEHOW HIS ARRIVAL SEEMED NATURAL.
TO BE A SPACEKNIGHT YOU WILL NEED THE ASSISTANCE OF DOCTOR DREDD!
DREDD'S ARCANE ARTS MERGED THE ALREADY LIGHT-TOUCHED BRANDY WITH THE EMPTY ARMOR OF STARSHINE.

BRANDY GOT HER WISH. SHE BECAME A SPACEKNIGHT...
... UNDER DREDD'S CONTROL!
STARSHINE'S ALIVE AGAIN!
AND SHE'S DESTROYING CLAIRTON!

DREDD WAS A WRAITH WARLOCK. BRANDY--AS STARSHINE -- WAS ENTIRELY UNDER HIS SPELL.
THUS IT WAS THAT HE DISPATCHED HER TO SLAY ROM, FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ESPECIALLY ITS GREATEST WARRIOR, ROM HAS LONG BEEN OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE DIRE WRAITHS.
BUT ROM WAS NOT ROM.
ONLY HOURS BEFORE, QUASIMODO, THE LIVING COMPUTER, HAD TAKEN ROM'S ARMOR IN EXCHANGE FOR RESTORING TO ROM HIS HUMANITY.
IT WAS QUASIMODO WHOM STARSHINE KILLED...
...AND THE HORROR THAT ROM HAD BECOME SLEW THE DIABOLICAL DOCTOR DREDD, WHEN QUASIMODO'S RESTORATION OF ROM'S HUMAN FORM PROVED ONLY TEMPORARY.
WHO ARE YOU, THAT YOU HATED DR. DREDD ENOUGH TO KILL HIM?
BRANDY... CAN IT BE... THAT YOU... DO NOT KNOW
SHE KNEW.
LORD IN HEAVEN, CAN--CAN IT BE? ROM?!
ROM! OH, MY POOR, LOST LOVE!
FOR A BRIEF WHILE THIS VALLEY HAD BEEN A PARADISE. PURGATORY WAS SLOWLY TAKING OVER.

AND, AS IF DRAWN BY THE CARRION REEK OF THE BATTLE'S CASUALTIES...
...THE DOGS OF WAR FOOTPAD INTO EDEN!
〈STAND STILL, ALIEN, OR BE SLAIN!〉
〈I ARREST YOU IN THE NAME OF THE SOVIET STATE!〉
THE LANGUAGE IS RUSSIAN. THE TONE IS ONE OF COMMAND.
STARSHINE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THE FORMER, NOR DOES SHE RESPECT THE LATTER.
YOU DARE TO INTRUDE UPON MY GRIEF?!?
HER LIGHTEYES SHINE...
...AND THE RESULT IS AWESOME!
〈L-LENIN'S GHOST--!〉

YOU'RE SOVIET SOLDIERS, AREN'T YOU?
I RECOGNIZE YOUR UNIFORMS FROM A PHOTO SPREAD IN LIFE MAGAZINE.
I'M IN RUSSIA, THEN. ENEMY TERRITORY.
NOW... THAT YOU... ARE NO LONGER HUMAN... BRANDY... ALL TERRITORY... IS ENEMY TERRITORY.
WHAT SHALL WE DO THEN, ROM? WHERE SHALL WE GO?
TO QUASIMODO'S CAVE... WHERE I MIGHT REST IN PEACE.
NO!
I WON'T LET YOU DIE!
LIGHT AS BRIGHT AS ANY SUN...
...AND THE ALIENS ARE GONE.
IN THEIR WAKE, THE SOVIET SOLDIERS STAND LIGHT-LOCKED IN STARSHINE'S PARALYZING LIGHT-FIELD.
THEIR FAILURE TO REPORT BACK FROM KHYSTYM WILL SPARK AN INVESTIGATION...
...AND SOON.

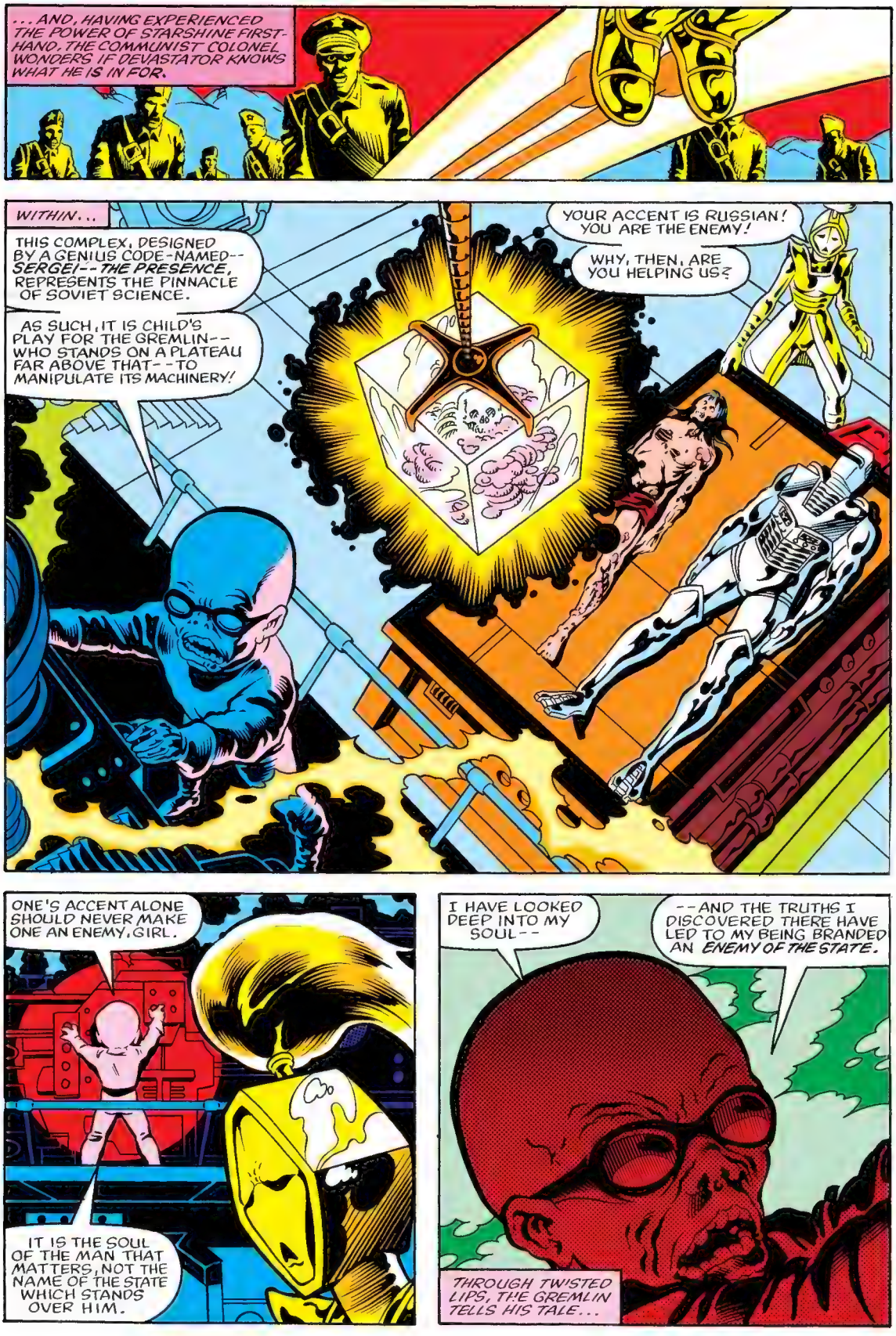

QUASIMODO'S CAVE.
IT WAS NOT ALWAYS CALLED THUS. FOR A LONG WHILE, IN FACT, IT WAS SO SECRET THAT IT POSSESSED NO IDENTIFYING NAME.
GREAT EXPERIMENTS WERE CARRIED OUT HERE.
THOSE EXPERIMENTS FAILED, AND THOSE ENGAGED IN THEM PERISHED FROM THE EARTH.
A MONUMENT TO MAN'S ABILITY TO OVERREACH HIMSELF, THE SUBTERRANEAN COMPLEX STILL STANDS.
IT WAS HERE... THAT QUASIMODO... MADE ME HUMAN.
HE'S PAID FOR HIS DUPLICITY, ROM. I MADE HIM PAY.
BUT WHAT DO I DO TO SAVE YOU NOW?
THIS CLONED BODY... I OCCUPY... IS DECOMPOSING... DYING.
IF I AM TO CONTINUE... TO EXIST--
--MY REMAINING HUMANITY... STORED IN YON STASIS CUBE... MUST BE GRAFTED BACK... INTO MY SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR.
TH-THEN YOU'RE AS GOOD AS DEAD, MY LOVE, FOR I'VE NOT THE KNOWLEDGE OF A SCIENTIST OR THE SKILL OF A SURGEON!
OH, ROM--I FEAR YOU ARE LOST!
NOT NECESSARILY, MY DEAR--

--FOR I POSSESS BOTH THE ABILITIES YOU NEED TO SAVE YOUR LOVER'S LIFE.
THE CHOICE IS YOURS WHETHER TO ACCEPT THE AID OF... THE GREMLIN!

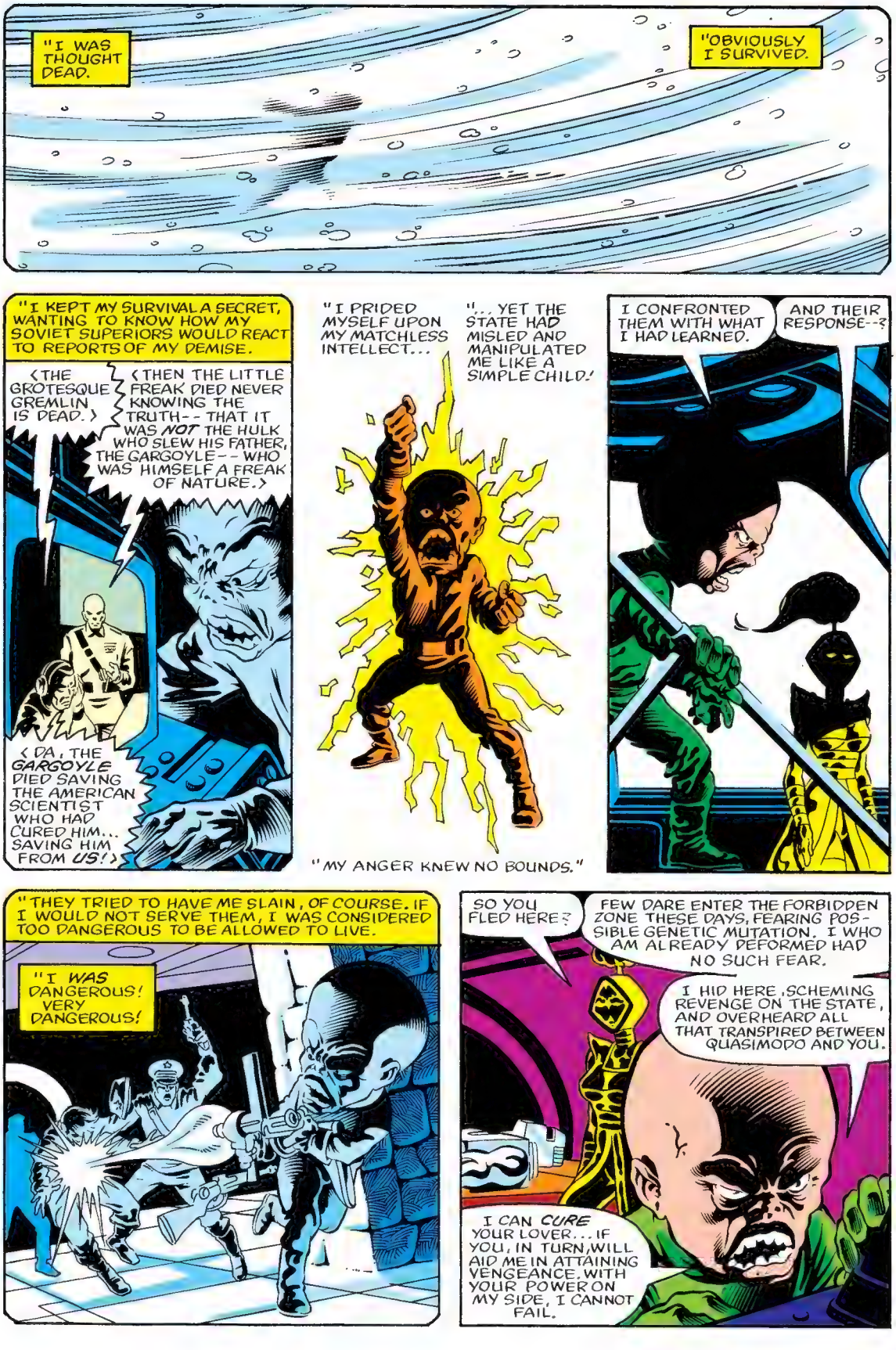
IN FAR-OFF MOSCOW, THE INVESTIGATION HAS PROCEEDED APACE. KNOWING THE SOLDIERS TO HAVE ENTERED THE FEARSOME FORBIDDEN ZONE...

...THE COMRADE COMMISSIONER IN CHARGE OF MILITARY MYSTERIES HAS DISPATCHED A RATHER SPECIAL FORCE.
FAST THEY FLY, AND FURIOUS...
...AND THEIR BOOT-JETS BURN THE SOIL ON THEIR ARRIVAL.
FWRROOSHHH!

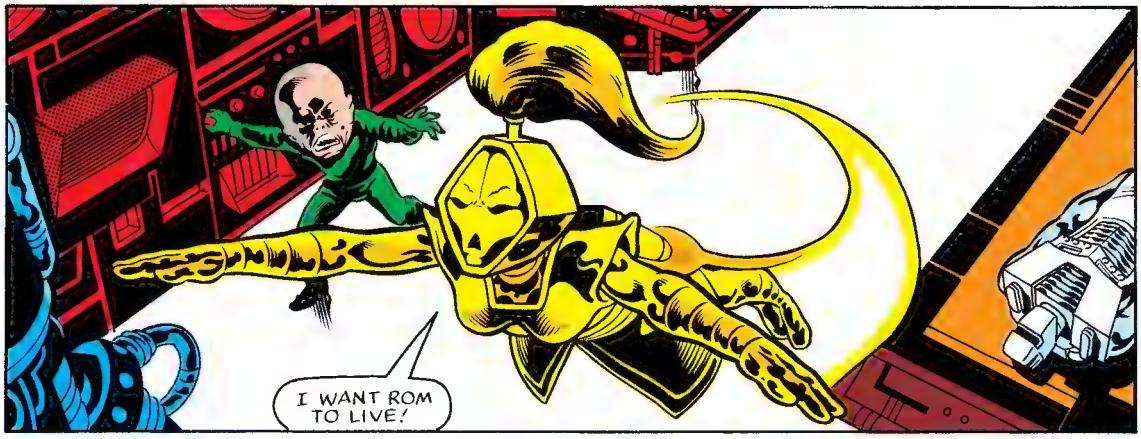
〈REPORT, COMRADE COLONEL! WHAT TRANSPIRES HERE?〉
THE MILITARY MAN DOES NOT RESPOND. HE CANNOT. THE LIGHT-FIELD FREEZES HIS LIPS.
BUT HIS EYES STARE INTENTLY INTO THE EBON FASTNESS OF QUASIMODO'S CAVE.
〈THE ENEMY WHO RENDERED YOU HELPLESS HAS RETREATED INTO THAT CAVE?〉
〈HE SHALL ANSWER FOR HUMILIATING YOU, COMRADE--〉
〈TO DEVASTATOR AND HIS SOVIET SUPER-TROOPERS!〉
AGAIN THE ROCKETS ROAR...

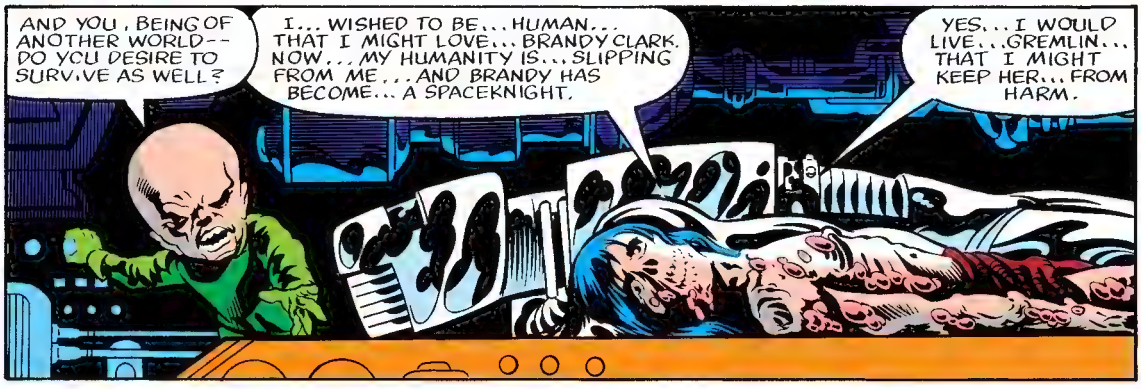

...AND, HAVING EXPERIENCED THE POWER OF STARSHINE FIRST-HAND, THE COMMUNIST COLONEL WONDERS IF DEVASTATOR KNOWS WHAT HE IS IN FOR.
WITHIN...
THIS COMPLEX, DESIGNED BY A GENIUS CODE-NAMED--SERGEI--THE PRESENCE, REPRESENTS THE PINNACLE OF SOVIET SCIENCE.
AS SUCH, IT IS CHILD'S PLAY FOR THE GREMLIN--WHO STANDS ON A PLATEAU FAR ABOVE THAT--TO MANIPULATE ITS MACHINERY!
YOUR ACCENT IS RUSSIAN! YOU ARE THE ENEMY!
WHY, THEN, ARE YOU HELPING US?
ONE'S ACCENT ALONE SHOULD NEVER MAKE ONE AN ENEMY, GIRL.
IT IS THE SOUL OF THE MAN THAT MATTERS, NOT THE NAME OF THE STATE WHICH STANDS OVER HIM.
I HAVE LOOKED DEEP INTO MY SOUL--
--AND THE TRUTHS I DISCOVERED THERE HAVE LED TO MY BEING BRANDED AN ENEMY OF THE STATE.
THROUGH TWISTED LIPS, THE GREMLIN TELLS HIS TALE...

"I WAS BORN IN AN ULTRASECRET SOVIET HOSPITAL, WITH MILITARY SCIENTISTS FOR DOCTORS AND RADIATION-SUITED SENTRIES EVERYWHERE.
"THEY WISHED TO STUDY ME, FOR I WAS DIFFERENT. MY MENTAL CAPACITY WAS MANY LEVELS ABOVE NORMAL. BY THE AGE OF 12, IT WAS I WHO WAS STUDYING THEM. BY THE TIME OF MY 13TH BIRTHDAY, THE GREMLIN WAS IN COMMAND.
"MY GENIUS WAS IN THE SERVICE OF THE STATE, FOR THE STATE WAS LOCKED IN A COLD WAR WITH AMERICA...
"... THE NATION THAT SPAWNED THE INCREDIBLE HULK--THE MONSTER THAT MURDERED MY FATHER... MY FATHER, WHO MEN CALLED THE GARGOYLE, AND WHO POSSESSED BOTH HEIGHTENED MENTAL POWER AND PHYSICAL DEFORMITY...
...AS DID HIS SON.
AGAIN I HEAR OF THIS CREATURE, THE HULK. IF I LIVE...
...WILL HIS PATH AND MINE EVER CROSS?
"VENGEANCE MOTIVATED ME. I SET OUT TO DESTROY THE HULK--
"--BY FASHIONING INCREDIBLY POWERFUL EXO-SKELETAL ARMOR TO BE WORN IN BATTLE AGAINST THE GREEN GOLIATH.
"THE HULK DEFEATED MY SUPER-TROOPERS WITH EASE--
"--AND MY COMMAND COMPLEX, BITTERFROST, BECAME A SLAG-SIDED CRATER IN THE ARCTIC ICE.


"I WAS THOUGHT DEAD.
"OBVIOUSLY I SURVIVED.
"I KEPT MY SURVIVAL A SECRET, WANTING TO KNOW HOW MY SOVIET SUPERIORS WOULD REACT TO REPORTS OF MY DEMISE.
(THE GROTESQUE GREMLIN IS DEAD.)
(THEN THE LITTLE FREAK DIED NEVER KNOWING THE TRUTH--THAT IT WAS NOT THE HULK WHO SLEW HIS FATHER, THE GARGOYLE--WHO WAS HIMSELF A FREAK OF NATURE.)
(DA, THE GARGOYLE DIED SAVING THE AMERICAN SCIENTIST WHO HAD CURED HIM... SAVING HIM FROM US!)
"I PRIDED MYSELF UPON MY MATCHLESS INTELLECT...
"...YET THE STATE HAD MISLED AND MANIPULATED ME LIKE A SIMPLE CHILD!
"MY ANGER KNEW NO BOUNDS."
I CONFRONTED THEM WITH WHAT I HAD LEARNED.
AND THEIR RESPONSE--?
"THEY TRIED TO HAVE ME SLAIN, OF COURSE. IF I WOULD NOT SERVE THEM, I WAS CONSIDERED TOO DANGEROUS TO BE ALLOWED TO LIVE.
"I WAS DANGEROUS! VERY DANGEROUS!
SO YOU FLED HERE?
FEW DARE ENTER THE FORBIDDEN ZONE THESE DAYS, FEARING POSSIBLE GENETIC MUTATION. I WHO AM ALREADY DEFORMED HAD NO SUCH FEAR.
I HID HERE, SCHEMING REVENGE ON THE STATE, AND OVERHEARD ALL THAT TRANSPIRED BETWEEN QUASIMODO AND YOU.
I CAN CURE YOUR LOVER... IF YOU, IN TURN, WILL AID ME IN ATTAINING VENGEANCE. WITH YOUR POWER ON MY SIDE, I CANNOT FAIL.

〈THE ONLY THING YOU WILL ATTAIN, YOU MISBEGOTTEN FREAK, IS A SWIFT AND HORRIBLE DEATH!
SOMEONE CRYING OUT IN RUSSIAN--!
NOT JUST SOMEONE, STARSHINE--
"IT IS DEVASTATOR COMMANDING THE VERY SUPER-TROOPERS I CREATED!"
〈THE TREACHEROUS WORDS DRIPPING FROM YOUR OWN DEFORMED LIPS BRAND YOU AN ENEMY OF THE STATE, GREMLIN!〉
〈IN THE NAME OF THE STATE, THEN, YOU AND ALL WHO STAND BESIDE YOU... SHALL DIE!〉
THEY'RE ATTACKING! WHAT HAPPENS NOW?
IF YOU WANT YOUR LOVER TO LIVE AGAIN, STARSHINE--
--YOU MUST ATTACK WHILE I AFFECT A CURE!
YES!


I WANT ROM TO LIVE!


AND YOU, BEING OF ANOTHER WORLD--DO YOU DESIRE TO SURVIVE AS WELL?
I... WISHED TO BE... HUMAN... THAT I MIGHT LOVE... BRANDY CLARK. NOW... MY HUMANITY IS... SLIPPING FROM ME... AND BRANDY HAS BECOME... A SPACEKNIGHT.
YES... I WOULD LIVE... GREMLIN... THAT I MIGHT KEEP HER... FROM HARM.

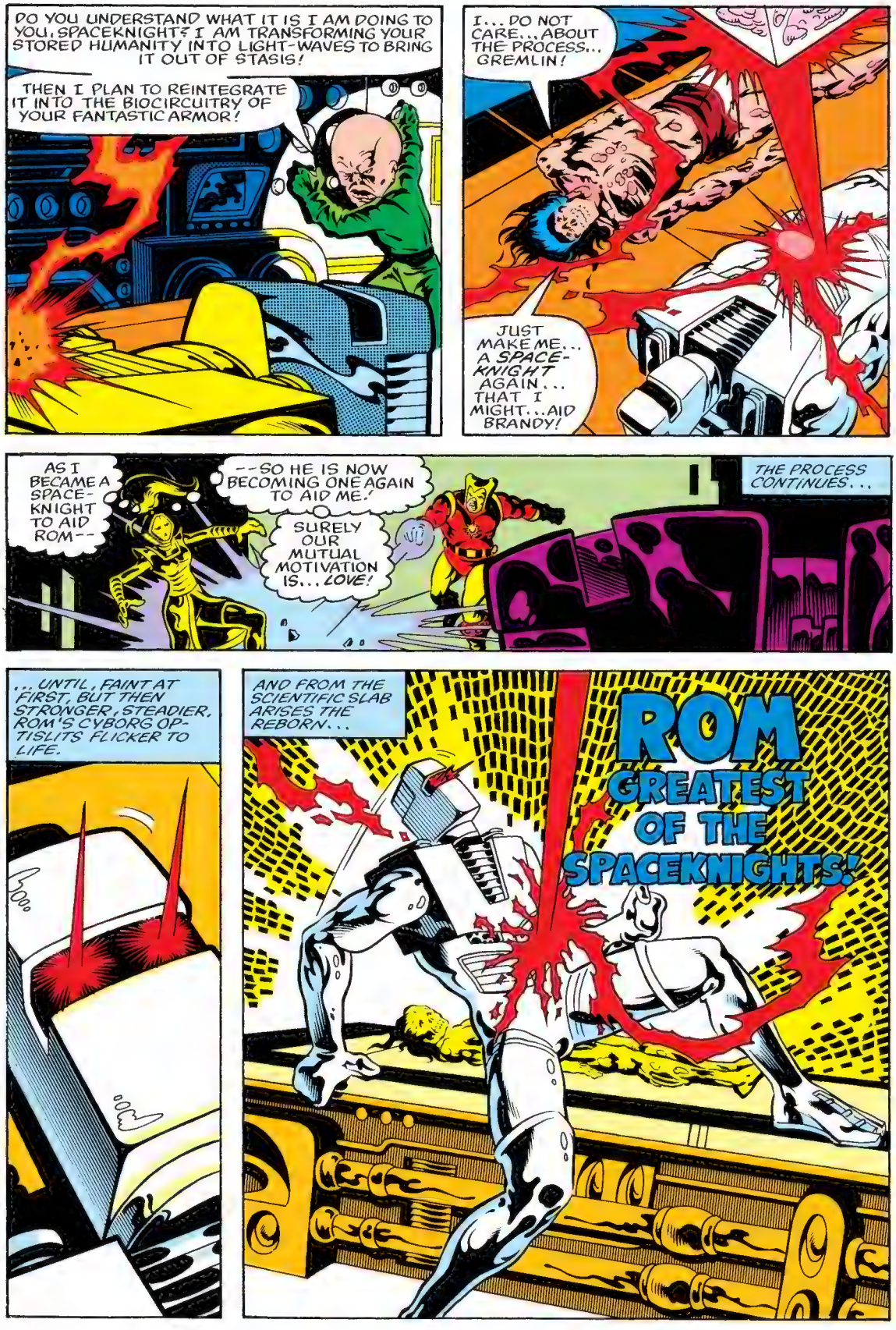
KEEP STARSHINE FROM HARM? NOT LIKELY.
I'M BESET ON ALL SIDES! WHAT WOULD THE REAL STARSHINE HAVE DONE IN MY PLACE?
SHE WOULD USE HER LIGHTEYES VISION--BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN!

SO INTENSE IS THE SOLAR BURST THAT, EVEN THROUGH THEIR TINTED LENSES, THE SUPER-TROOPERS FEEL THEIR RETINAE SEARED...
<LOOK OUT, COMRADE! I-I CANNOT SEE!>
<NOR CAN I COMRADE!>

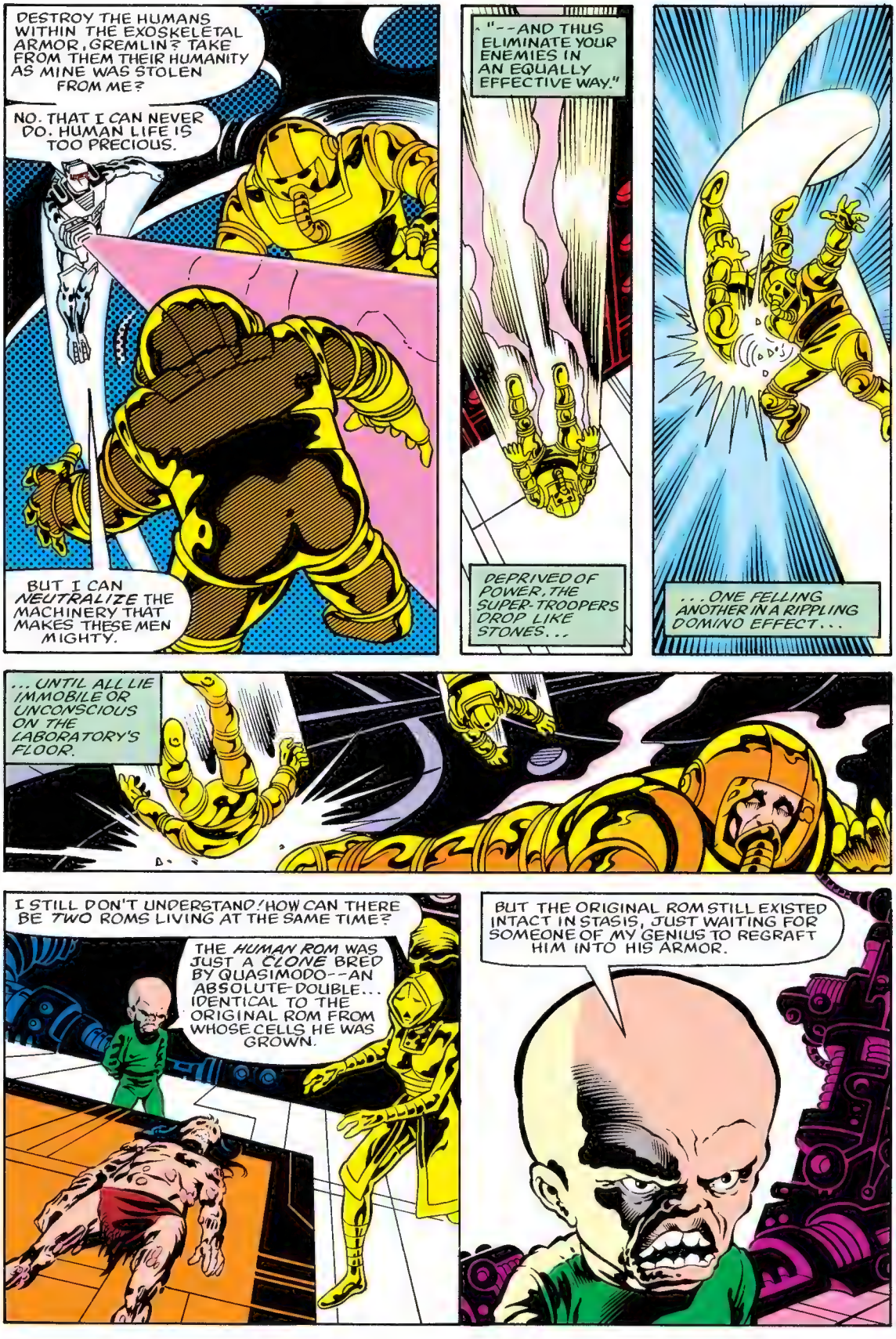
...AND LIKE BLINDED EAGLES, THEY FLAIL HELPLESSLY TO EARTH.
KRASH

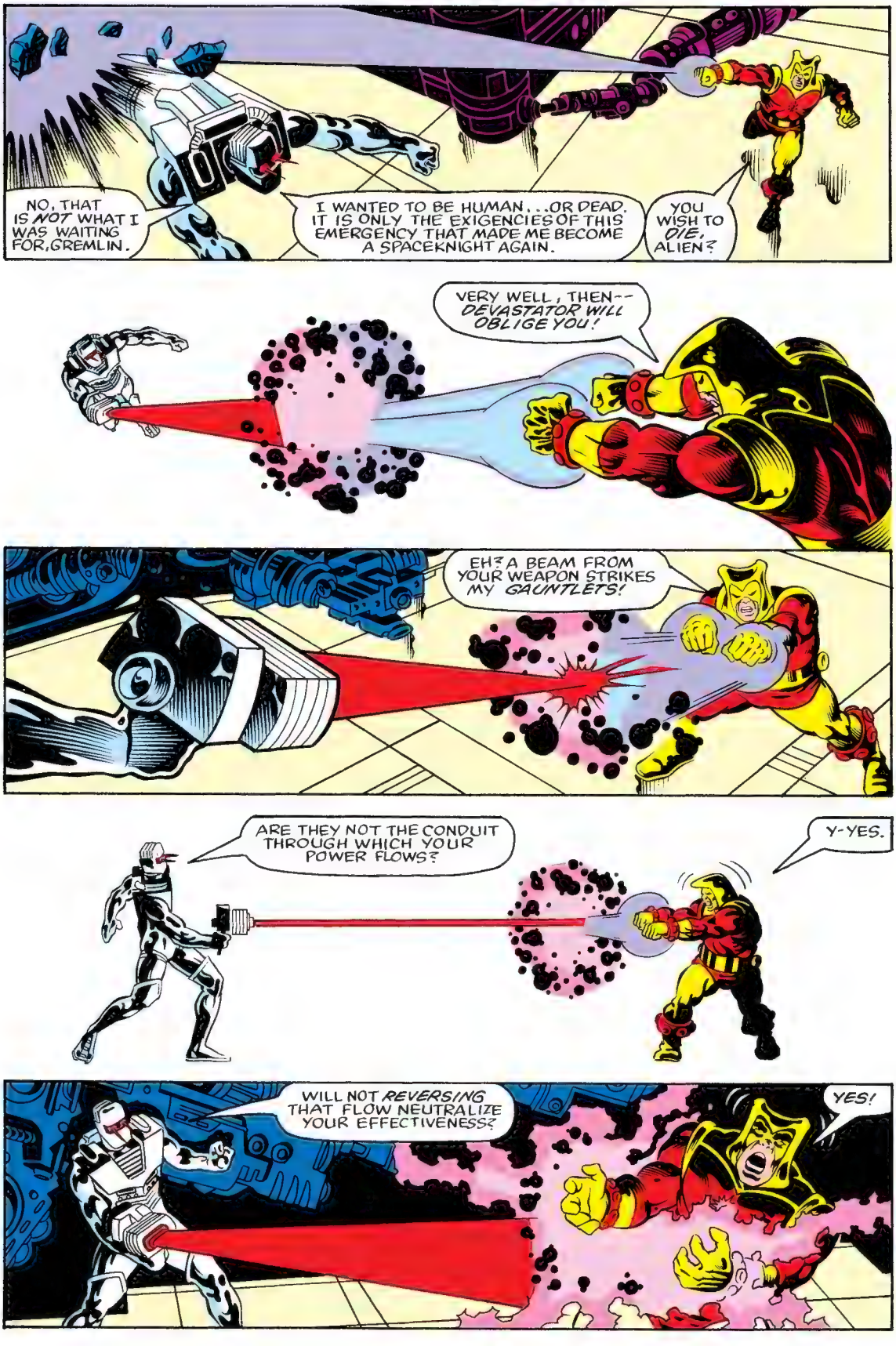
BLINDING MY ENEMY IS TOO DEFENSIVE AN ACTION! I FIND THAT I WANT TO HURT THEM MORE!
(MY EXOSKELETAL ARMOR GROWS HOT! MY CIRCUITS BEGIN TO SMOLDER!)
YEEARRGHH!
NO NEED TO TRANSLATE THAT LAST CRY, RUSSIAN!
I CAN IMAGINE WHAT YOU MUST BE SAYING ABOUT BEING TRAPPED INSIDE MELTING ARMOR!
YOU WILL NEED NO TRANSLATION TO UNDERSTAND ME, WOMAN, FOR I HAVE BEEN SCHOOLED IN ENGLISH!
AND I THINK YOU WILL FIND THAT POWER IS A LANGUAGE UNTO ITSELF!
YES, POWER IS A LANGUAGE!
KWADOOM!
OHHH!
A LANGUAGE THAT MAY BE TRANSLATED INTO PAIN!
YOUR COMPATRIOT IS HURT, ROM!
HELP ME... TO HELP HER!
HELP YOU TO HELP HER DESTROY THE VERY LIVING WEAPONS I CREATED?

WHY NOT? WHO ELSE BUT THE GENIUS WHICH DEVISED THE CONCEPT OF THE WARRIOR NAMED DEVASTATOR COULD KNOW THAT HIS POWERSTEMS NOT FROM EARTH--
NOT... FROM EARTH?
"--BUT FROM AN UNDETECTABLE SATELLITE ENCIRCLING THE GLOBE, PULSING POWER BROADCASTS DOWNWARD...
"...TO THE GAUNTLETS ENCASING DEVASTATOR'S HANDS!"
THE ORIGINAL DEVASTATOR DIED WHEN THAT POWER WAS CONTAINED BY THE INCREDIBLE HULK!*
BUT THE CONCEPT SURVIVED, AS DID THE SATELLITE!
BUT ENOUGH! NOW IS NO TIME TO PONDER MY ERROR IN BEQUEATHING SO DEADLY AN IDEA TO THE STATE!
NOW IS THE TIME TO EFFECT A CURE, THAT YOU MIGHT SAVE ME FROM A DEATH OF MY OWN DEVISEMENT!
* HULK #186-- RALPH.
UNDER THE GREMLIN'S DEFT MANIPULATION, THE MACHINERY OF THE SUBTERRANEAN COMPLEX HUMS TO LIFE.
A BEAM OF ENERGY PLAYS ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE STASIS CUBE CONTAINING WHAT IS LEFT OF ROM'S HUMANITY...
...AND A SECOND BEAM STABS DOWNWARD AT THE SPACEKNIGHT'S INANIMATE SILVER ARMOR.

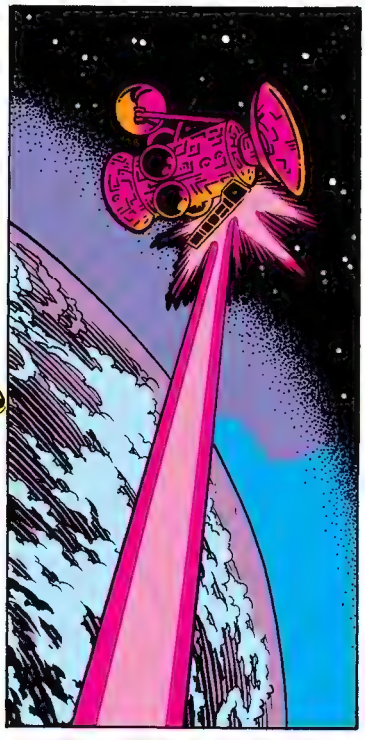

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS I AM DOING TO YOU, SPACEKNIGHT? I AM TRANSFORMING YOUR STORED HUMANITY INTO LIGHT-WAVES TO BRING IT OUT OF STASIS!
THEN I PLAN TO REINTEGRATE IT INTO THE BIOCIRCUITRY OF YOUR FANTASTIC ARMOR!
I... DO NOT CARE... ABOUT THE PROCESS... GREMLIN!
JUST MAKE ME... A SPACE-KNIGHT AGAIN... THAT I MIGHT... AID BRANDY!
AS I BECAME A SPACE-KNIGHT TO AID ROM--
--SO HE IS NOW BECOMING ONE AGAIN TO AID ME.'
SURELY OUR MUTUAL MOTIVATION IS... LOVE!
THE PROCESS CONTINUES...
... UNTIL, FAINT AT FIRST, BUT THEN STRONGER, STEADIER, ROM'S CYBORG OPTISLITS FLICKER TO LIFE.
AND FROM THE SCIENTIFIC SLAB ARISES THE REBORN...
ROM
GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!

AGAIN I AM A SPACEKNIGHT.
AGAIN I STAND IMPRISONED IN A SHELL OF GALADORIAN STEEL LIVING THROUGH NEUROLINKAGES, EXPERIENCING THROUGH BIOCIRCUITS.
AGAIN I WHO LONG TO BE HUMAN HAVE LOST MY HUMANITY...
WHILE I... WHO HAVE ATTAINED HUMANITY... MUST ASK... WHAT HAS IT GAINED ME?
PATHETIC PILE OF MORTIFYING FLESH. PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BETTER TO DIE AS YOU ARE DYING--
-- THEN TO LIVE THIS HALF-LIFE TO WHICH I AM CONDEMNED.
THE ORIGINAL, AND THE CLONE.
TWO ROMS?!
BOTH EXIST NOW, FOR A TIME.
NONE OF US WILL EXIST IF DEVASTATOR AND HIS SUPER-TROOPERS ARE NOT SOON DEALT WITH.
I GAVE YOU LIFE, SPACEKNIGHT! PAY BACK YOUR DEBT!
I DO NOT NEED TO BE REMINDED OF MY OBLIGATIONS, GREMLIN. MY ENTIRE LIFE HAS BEEN ONE OF SLAVERY TO DUTY.
THUS, IF DUTY NOW BIDS ROM SAVE YOU FROM YOUR ENEMIES, THEN THAT IS WHAT THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT SHALL DO.
DON'T MERELY SAVE ME FROM MY CREATIONS, ROM! DESTROY THEM SO THAT THEY NEVER PLAGUE ME AGAIN!

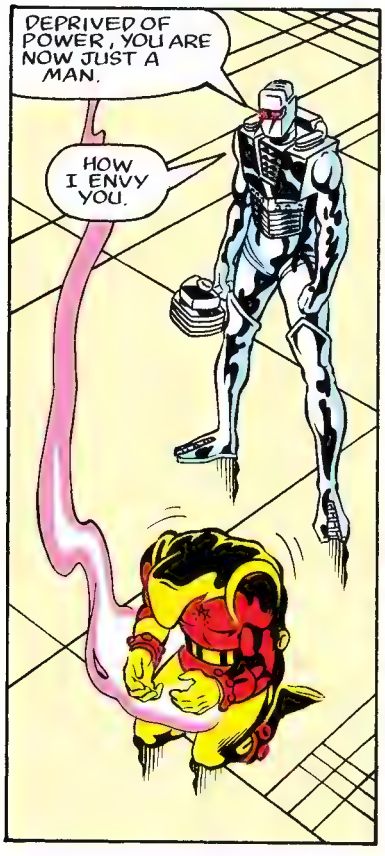

DESTROY THE HUMANS WITHIN THE EXOSKELETAL ARMOR, GREMLIN? TAKE FROM THEM THEIR HUMANITY AS MINE WAS STOLEN FROM ME?
NO. THAT I CAN NEVER DO. HUMAN LIFE IS TOO PRECIOUS.
BUT I CAN NEUTRALIZE THE MACHINERY THAT MAKES THESE MEN MIGHTY.
"--AND THUS ELIMINATE YOUR ENEMIES IN AN EQUALLY EFFECTIVE WAY."
DEPRIVED OF POWER, THE SUPER-TROOPERS DROP LIKE STONES...
...ONE FELLING ANOTHER IN A RIPPLING DOMINO EFFECT...
...UNTIL ALL LIE IMMOBILE OR UNCONSCIOUS ON THE LABORATORY'S FLOOR.
I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND! HOW CAN THERE BE TWO ROMS LIVING AT THE SAME TIME?
THE HUMAN ROM WAS JUST A CLONE BRED BY QUASIMODO--AN ABSOLUTE-DOUBLE... IDENTICAL TO THE ORIGINAL ROM FROM WHOSE CELLS HE WAS GROWN.
BUT THE ORIGINAL ROM STILL EXISTED INTACT IN STASIS, JUST WAITING FOR SOMEONE OF MY GENIUS TO REGRAFT HIM INTO HIS ARMOR.


NO, THAT IS *NOT* WHAT I WAS WAITING FOR, GREMLIN.
I WANTED TO BE HUMAN...OR DEAD. IT IS ONLY THE EXIGENCIES OF THIS EMERGENCY THAT MADE ME BECOME A SPACEKNIGHT AGAIN.
YOU WISH TO *DIE*, ALIEN?
VERY WELL, THEN-- *DEVASTATOR* WILL OBLIGE YOU!
EH? A BEAM FROM YOUR WEAPON STRIKES MY *GAUNTLETS!*
ARE THEY NOT THE CONDUIT THROUGH WHICH YOUR POWER FLOWS?
Y-YES.
WILL NOT *REVERSING* THAT FLOW NEUTRALIZE YOUR EFFECTIVENESS?
YES!

WILL NOT SENDING YOUR POWER BACK FROM WHENCE IT CAME CUT OFF THAT POWER... AT ITS SOURCE?
YES!
WELL, THEN... I SHALL DO IT.

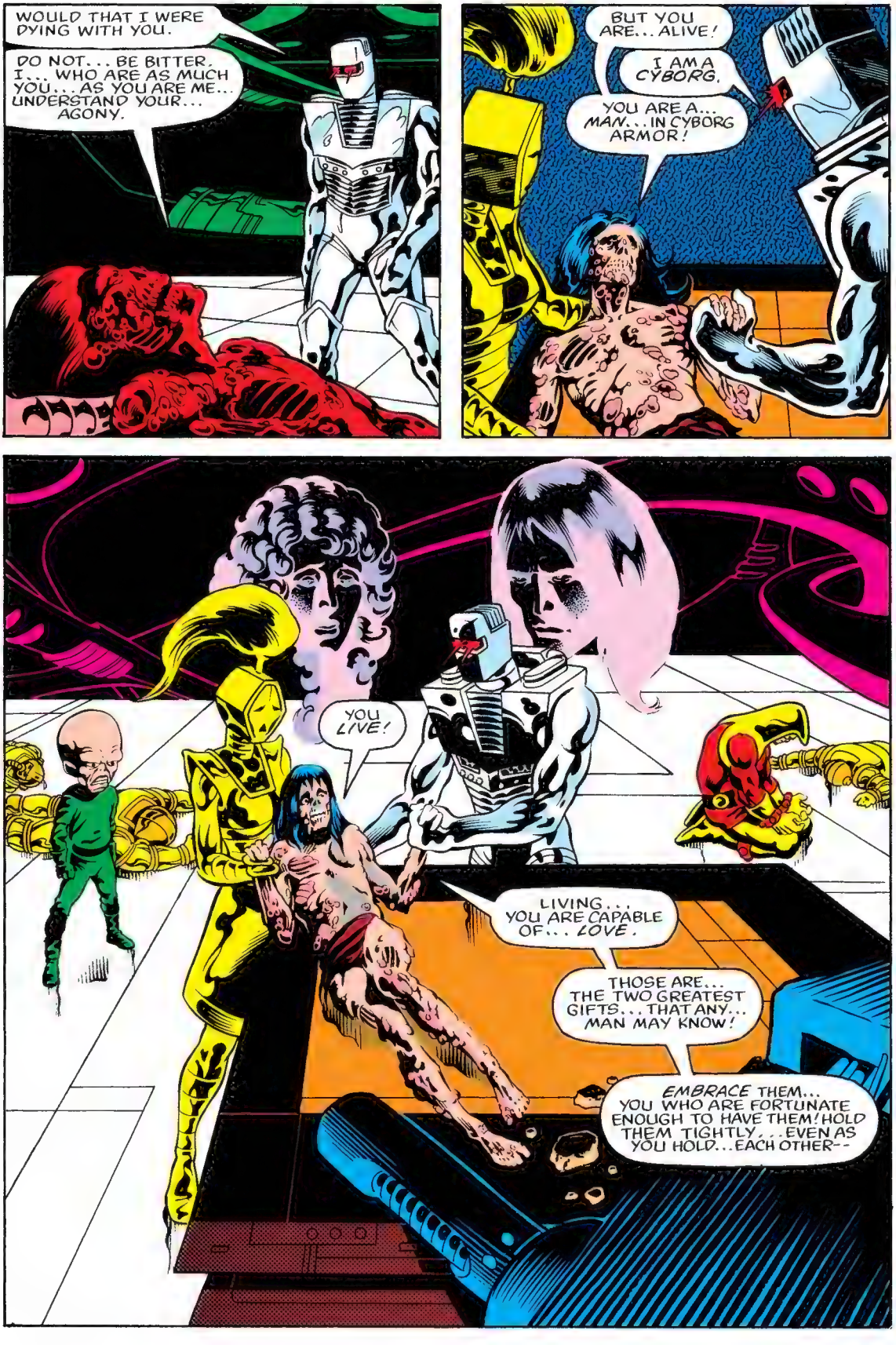

FLOWING THROUGH THE POWER-RECEIVERS IN DEVASTATOR'S GAUNTLETS, ROM'S NEUTRALIZER BEAM STABS SKYWARD...

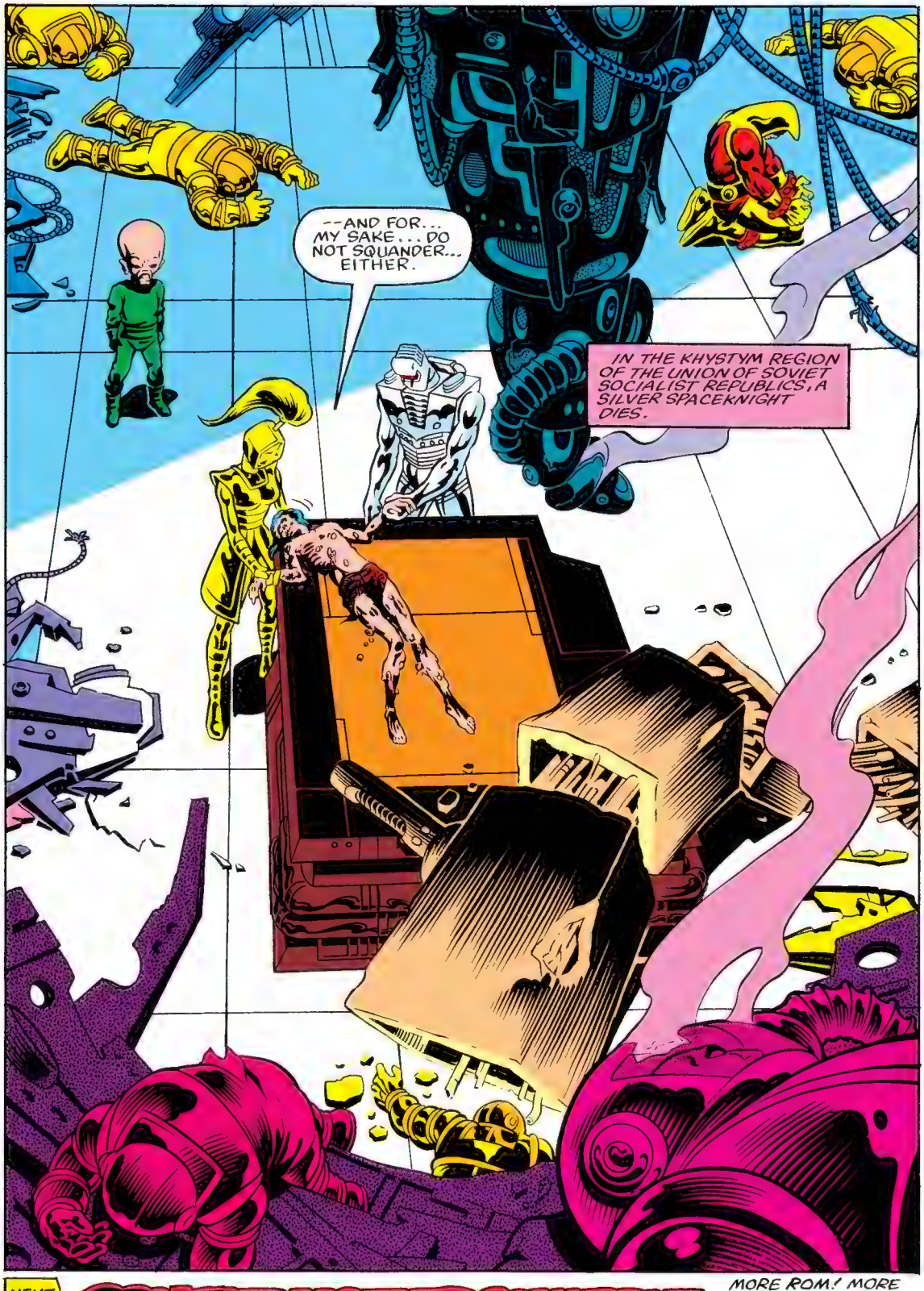
...TO NEUTRALIZE THE ORBITING SATELLITE THAT IS THE SOURCE OF THE POWER TRANSMISSIONS TO DEVASTATOR.

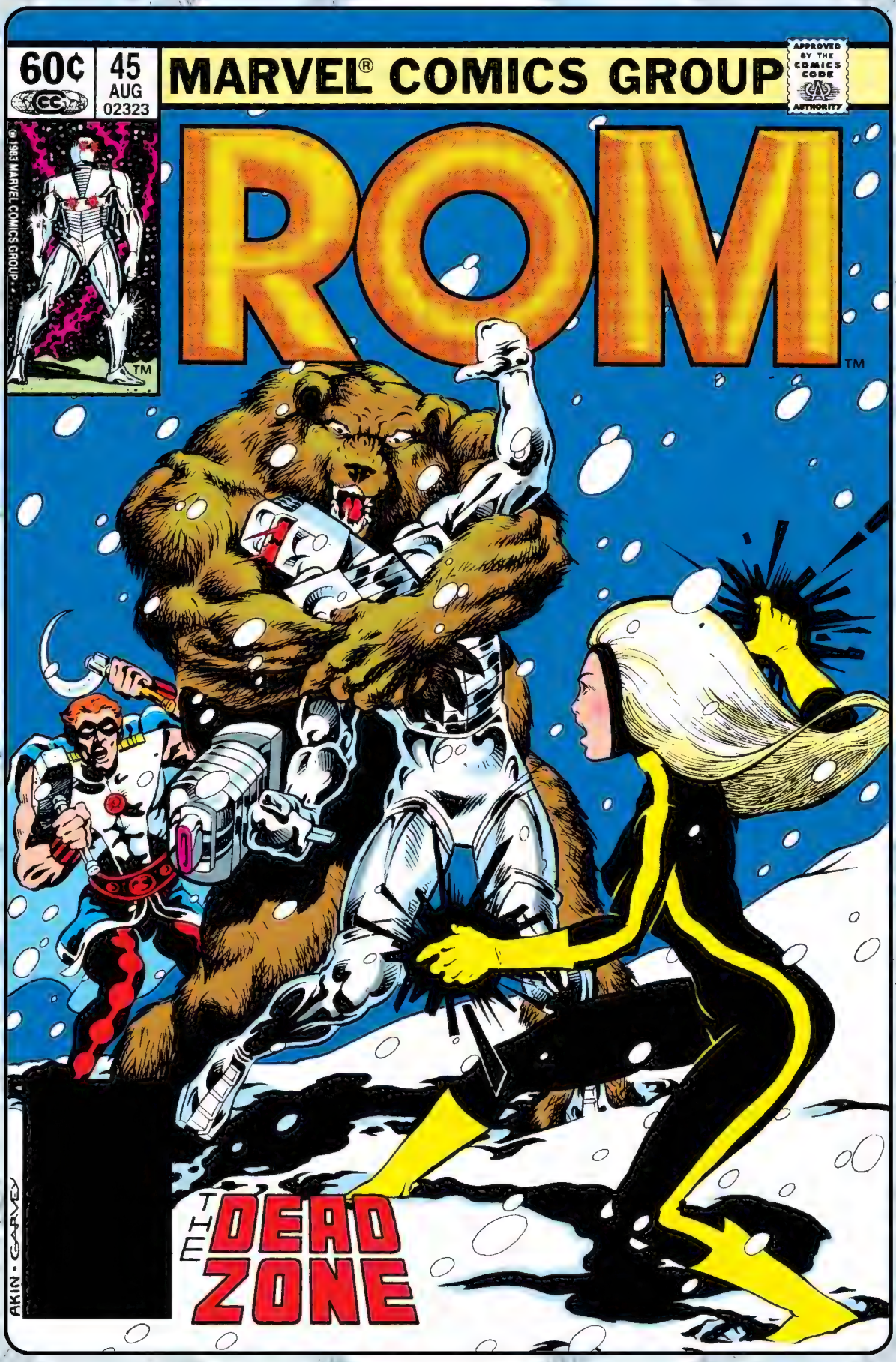

DEPRIVED OF POWER, YOU ARE NOW JUST A MAN.
HOW I ENVY YOU.

YOU'VE DONE IT, SPACEKNIGHT! YOU'VE BEATEN THE STATE!

GREMLIN!
ROM IS DYING!!!


WOULD THAT I WERE DYING WITH YOU.
DO NOT... BE BITTER. I... WHO ARE AS MUCH YOU... AS YOU ARE ME... UNDERSTAND YOUR... AGONY.
BUT YOU ARE... ALIVE!
I AM A CYBORG.
YOU ARE A... MAN... IN CYBORG ARMOR!
YOU LIVE!
LIVING... YOU ARE CAPABLE OF... LOVE.
THOSE ARE... THE TWO GREATEST GIFTS... THAT ANY... MAN MAY KNOW!
EMBRACE THEM... YOU WHO ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE THEM! HOLD THEM TIGHTLY... EVEN AS YOU HOLD... EACH OTHER--


--AND FOR... MY SAKE... DO NOT SQUANDER... EITHER.
IN THE KHYSTYM REGION OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS, A SILVER SPACEKNIGHT DIES.
NEXT MONTH
CRY, THE MOTHER COUNTRY!
MORE ROM! MORE STARSHINE! MORE GREMLIN!
PLUS: THE SOVIET SUPER-TROOPERS!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ROM™
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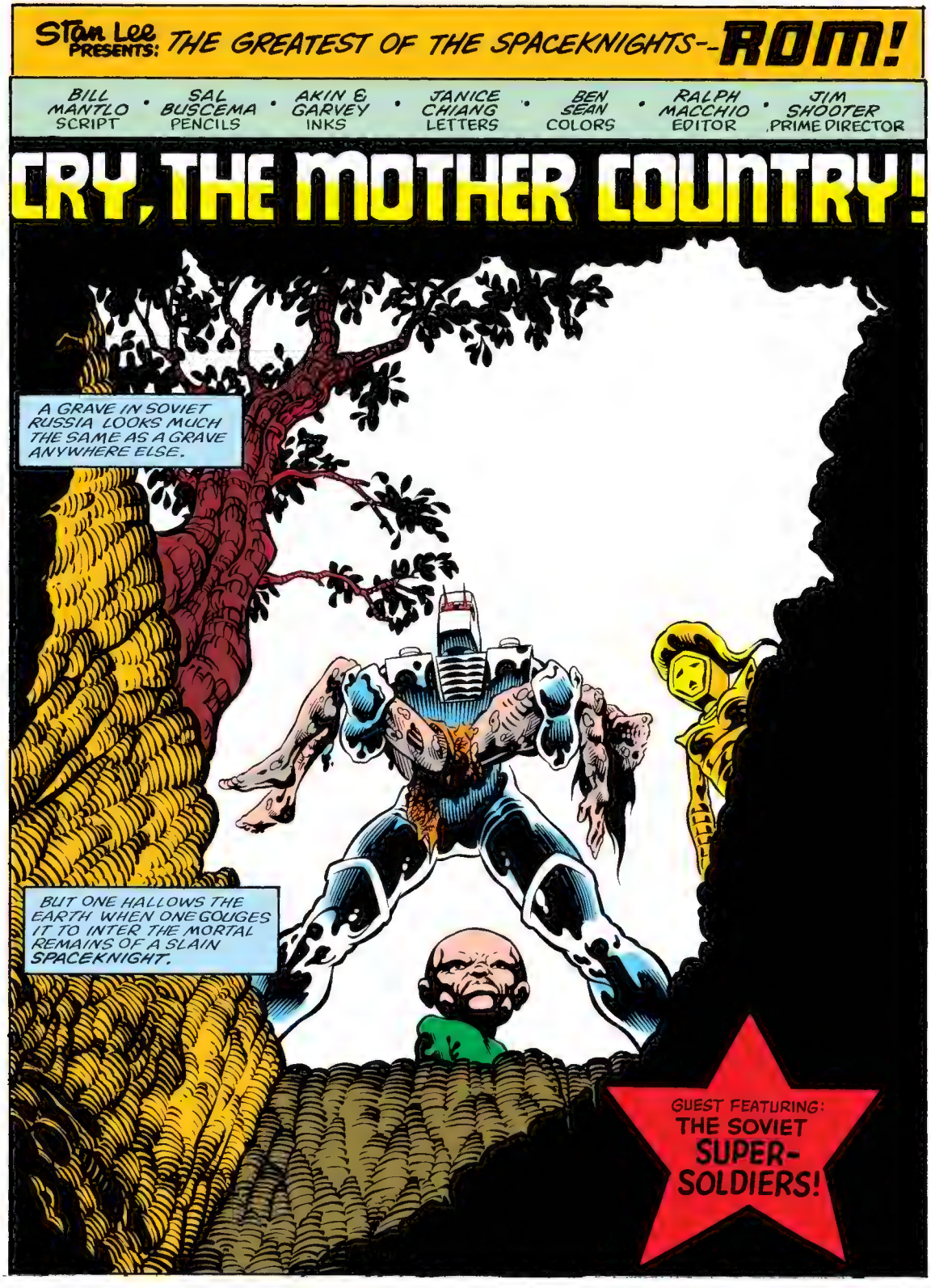
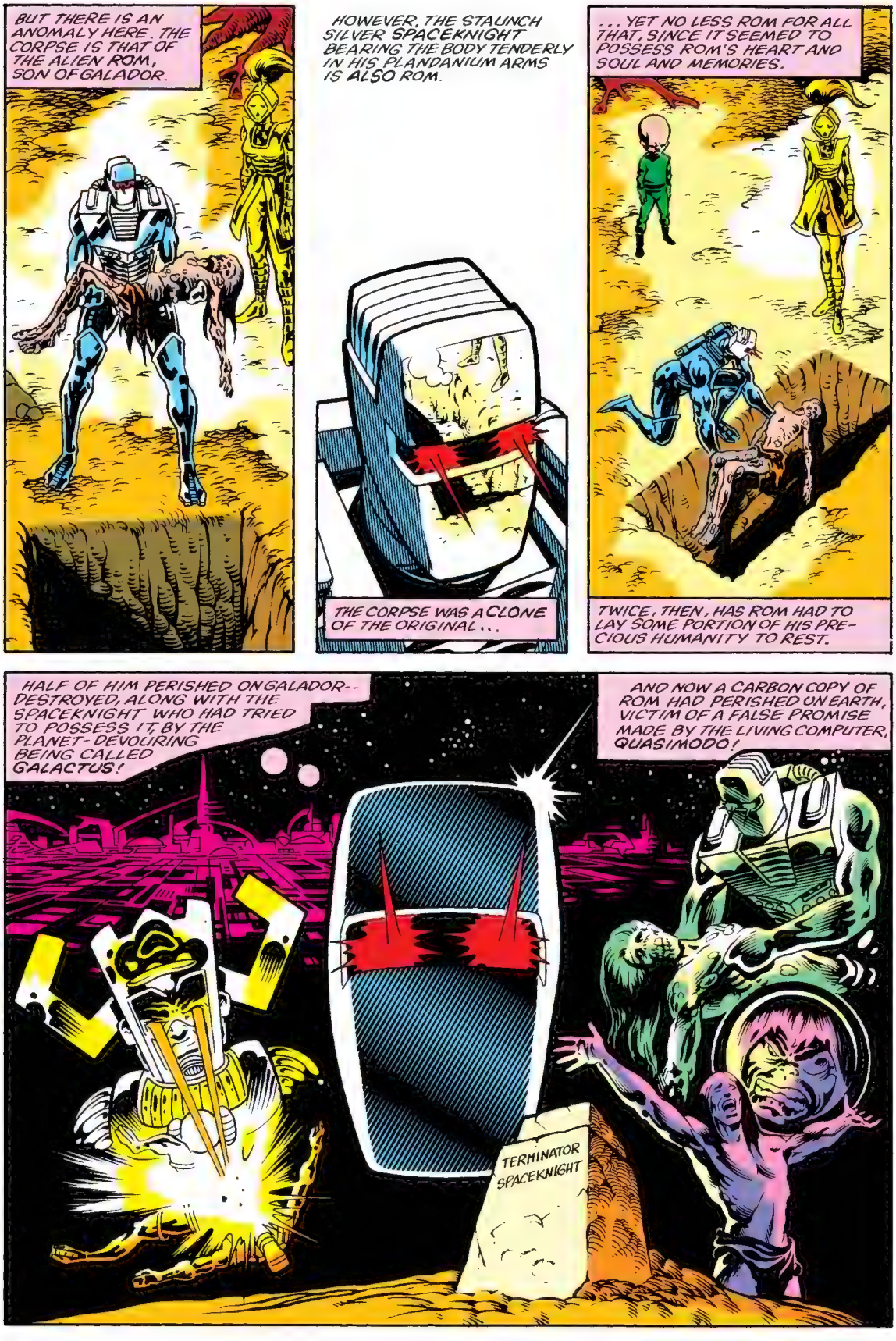
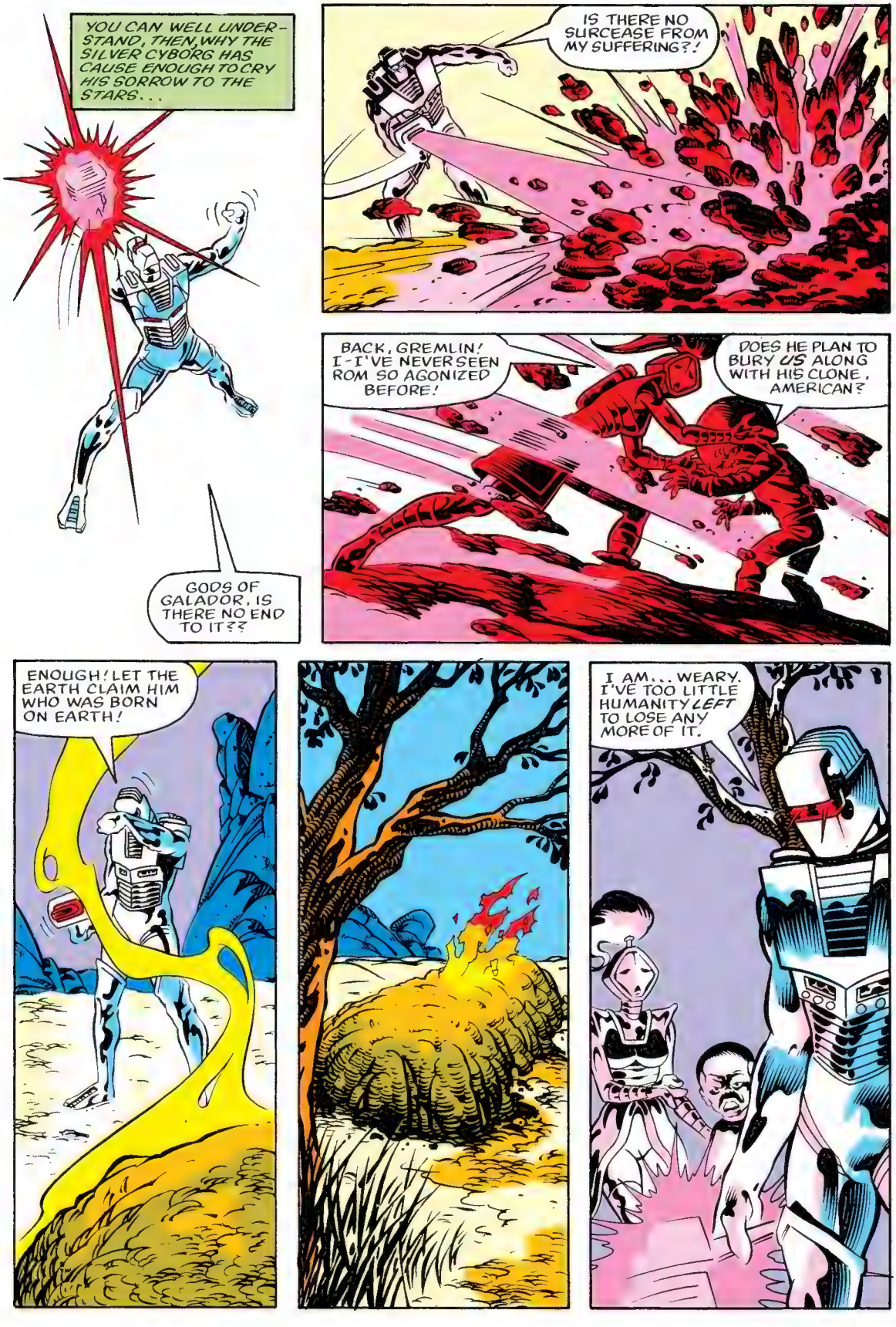
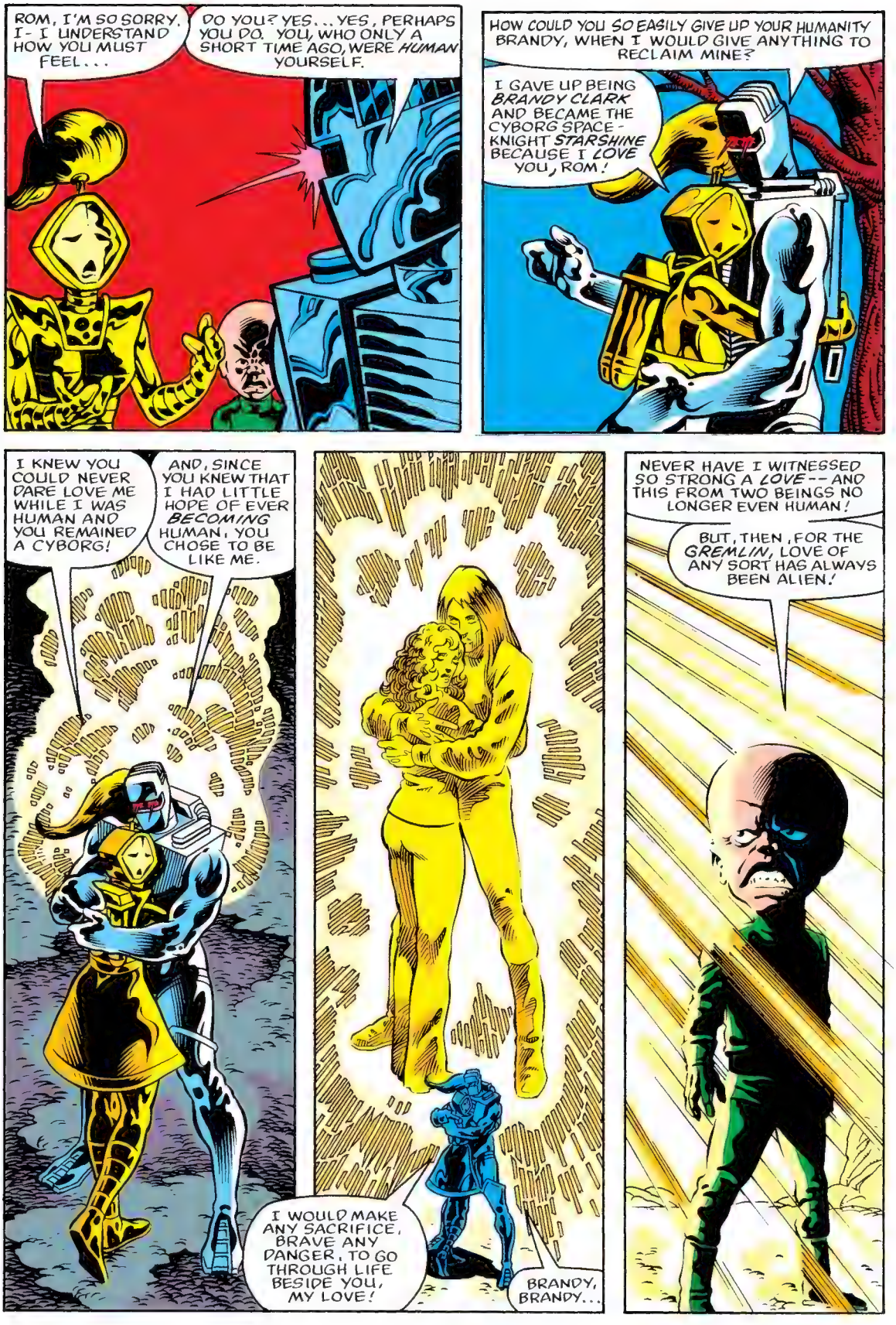
THE DEAD ZONE
AKIN • GARVEY


Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPT
SAL BUSCEMA PENCILS
AKIN & GARVEY INKS
JANICE CHIANG LETTERS
BEN SEAN COLORS
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
CRY, THE MOTHER COUNTRY!
A GRAVE IN SOVIET RUSSIA LOOKS MUCH THE SAME AS A GRAVE ANYWHERE ELSE.
BUT ONE HALLOWS THE EARTH WHEN ONE GOUGES IT TO INTER THE MORTAL REMAINS OF A SLAIN SPACEKNIGHT.
GUEST FEATURING: THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS!


BUT THERE IS AN ANOMALY HERE. THE CORPSE IS THAT OF THE ALIEN ROM, SON OF GALADOR.
HOWEVER, THE STAUNCH SILVER SPACEKNIGHT BEARING THE BODY TENDERLY IN HIS PLANDANIUM ARMS IS ALSO ROM.
. . . YET NO LESS ROM FOR ALL THAT, SINCE IT SEEMED TO POSSESS ROM'S HEART AND SOUL AND MEMORIES.
THE CORPSE WAS A CLONE OF THE ORIGINAL . . .
TWICE, THEN, HAS ROM HAD TO LAY SOME PORTION OF HIS PRECIOUS HUMANITY TO REST.
HALF OF HIM PERISHED ON GALADOR--DESTROYED, ALONG WITH THE SPACEKNIGHT WHO HAD TRIED TO POSSESS IT, BY THE PLANET-DEVOURING BEING CALLED GALACTUS!
AND NOW A CARBON COPY OF ROM HAD PERISHED ON EARTH, VICTIM OF A FALSE PROMISE MADE BY THE LIVING COMPUTER, QUASIMODO!
TERMINATOR SPACEKNIGHT


YOU CAN WELL UNDERSTAND, THEN, WHY THE SILVER CYBORG HAS CAUSE ENOUGH TO CRY HIS SORROW TO THE STARS...
GODS OF GALADOR, IS THERE NO END TO IT??
IS THERE NO SURCEASE FROM MY SUFFERING?!
BACK, GREMLIN! I-I'VE NEVER SEEN ROM SO AGONIZED BEFORE!
DOES HE PLAN TO BURY US ALONG WITH HIS CLONE, AMERICAN?
ENOUGH! LET THE EARTH CLAIM HIM WHO WAS BORN ON EARTH!
I AM... WEARY. I'VE TOO LITTLE HUMANITY LEFT TO LOSE ANY MORE OF IT.

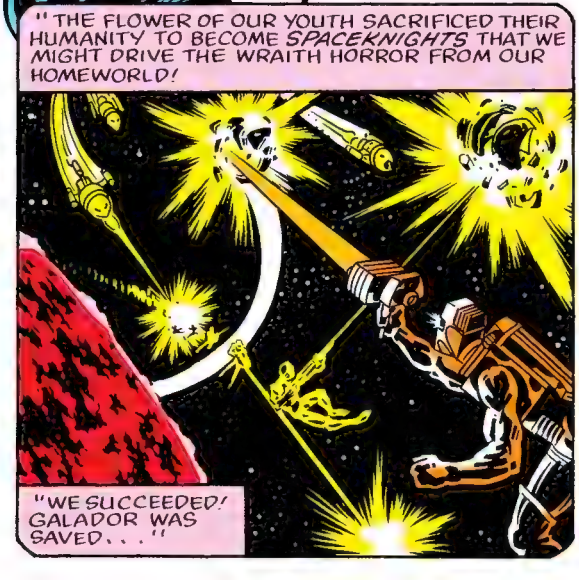

ROM, I'M SO SORRY. I- I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU MUST FEEL...
DO YOU? YES...YES, PERHAPS YOU DO. YOU, WHO ONLY A SHORT TIME AGO, WERE HUMAN YOURSELF.
HOW COULD YOU SO EASILY GIVE UP YOUR HUMANITY BRANDY, WHEN I WOULD GIVE ANYTHING TO RECLAIM MINE?
I GAVE UP BEING BRANDY CLARK AND BECAME THE CYBORG SPACE-KNIGHT STARSHINE BECAUSE I LOVE YOU, ROM!
I KNEW YOU COULD NEVER DARE LOVE ME WHILE I WAS HUMAN AND YOU REMAINED A CYBORG!
AND, SINCE YOU KNEW THAT I HAD LITTLE HOPE OF EVER BECOMING HUMAN, YOU CHOSE TO BE LIKE ME.
I WOULD MAKE ANY SACRIFICE, BRAVE ANY DANGER, TO GO THROUGH LIFE BESIDE YOU, MY LOVE!
BRANDY, BRANDY...
NEVER HAVE I WITNESSED SO STRONG A LOVE -- AND THIS FROM TWO BEINGS NO LONGER EVEN HUMAN!
BUT, THEN, FOR THE GREMLIN, LOVE OF ANY SORT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ALIEN!

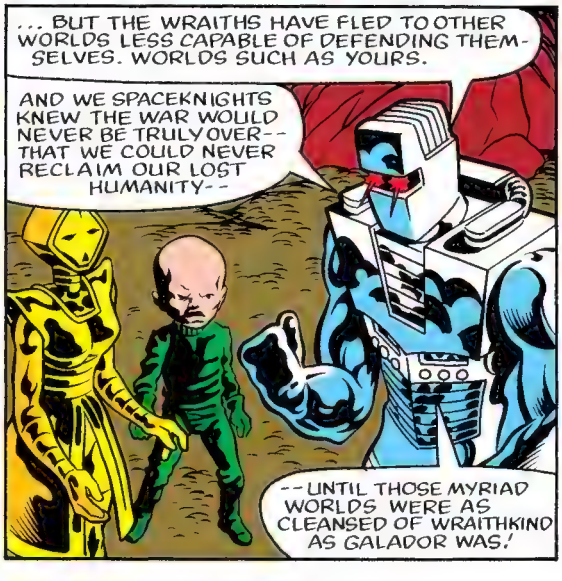
BRANDY--STARSHINE--THIS DAY I SWEAR AN OATH TO YOU... WE SHALL *BOTH* REGAIN OUR HUMANITY--
--ONCE EARTH IS CLEANSED FOREVER OF THE DREADED *DIRE WRAITHS!*
WHETHER IT TAKES A YEAR OR AN ETERNITY, ROM, I SHALL NOT CARE SO LONG AS I REMAIN WITH YOU!

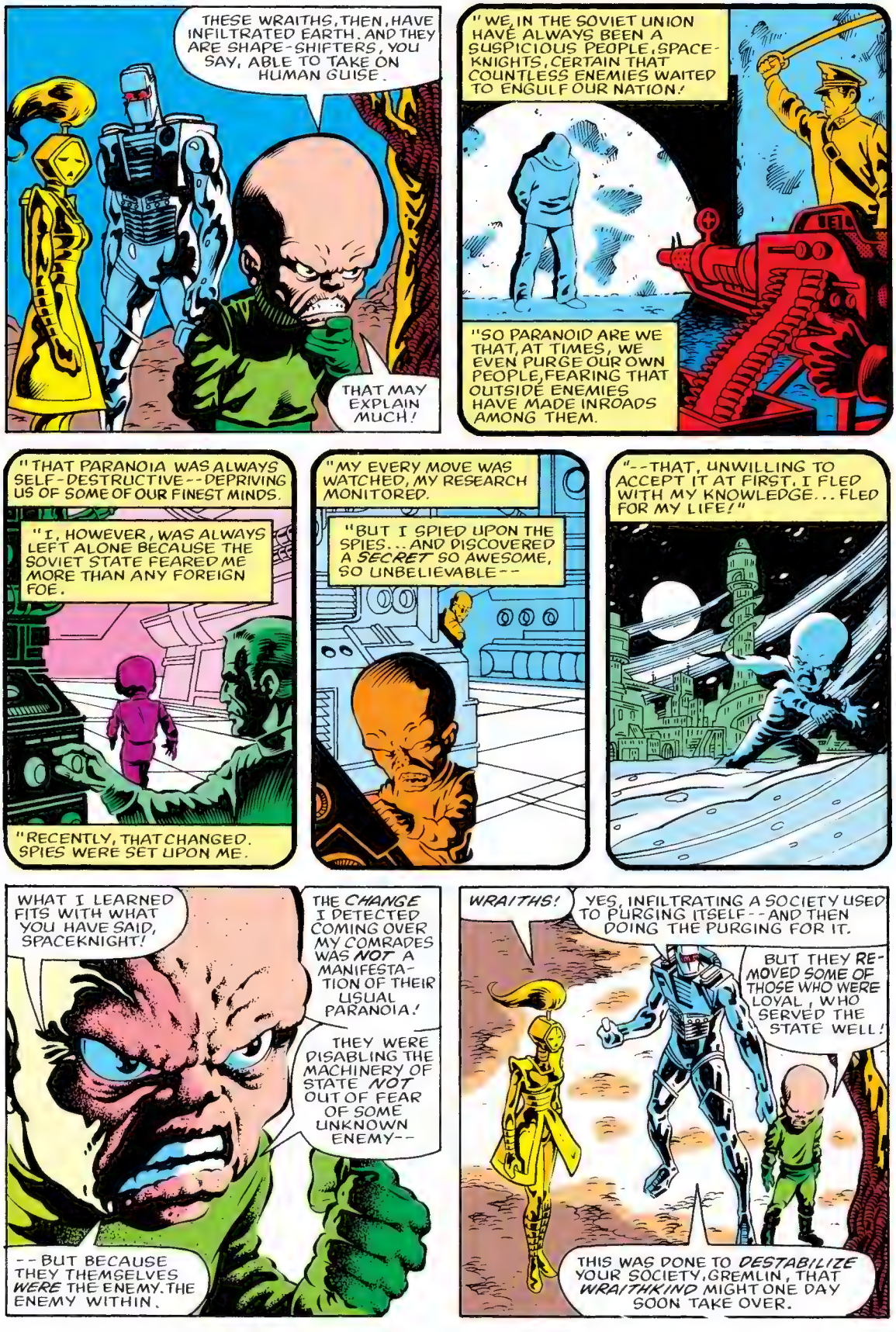
YOU SPOKE OF SOME RACE CALLED WRAITHKIND, SPACEKNIGHT?
IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL THOSE CREATURES WHOM I OBSERVED AIDING QUASIMODO?

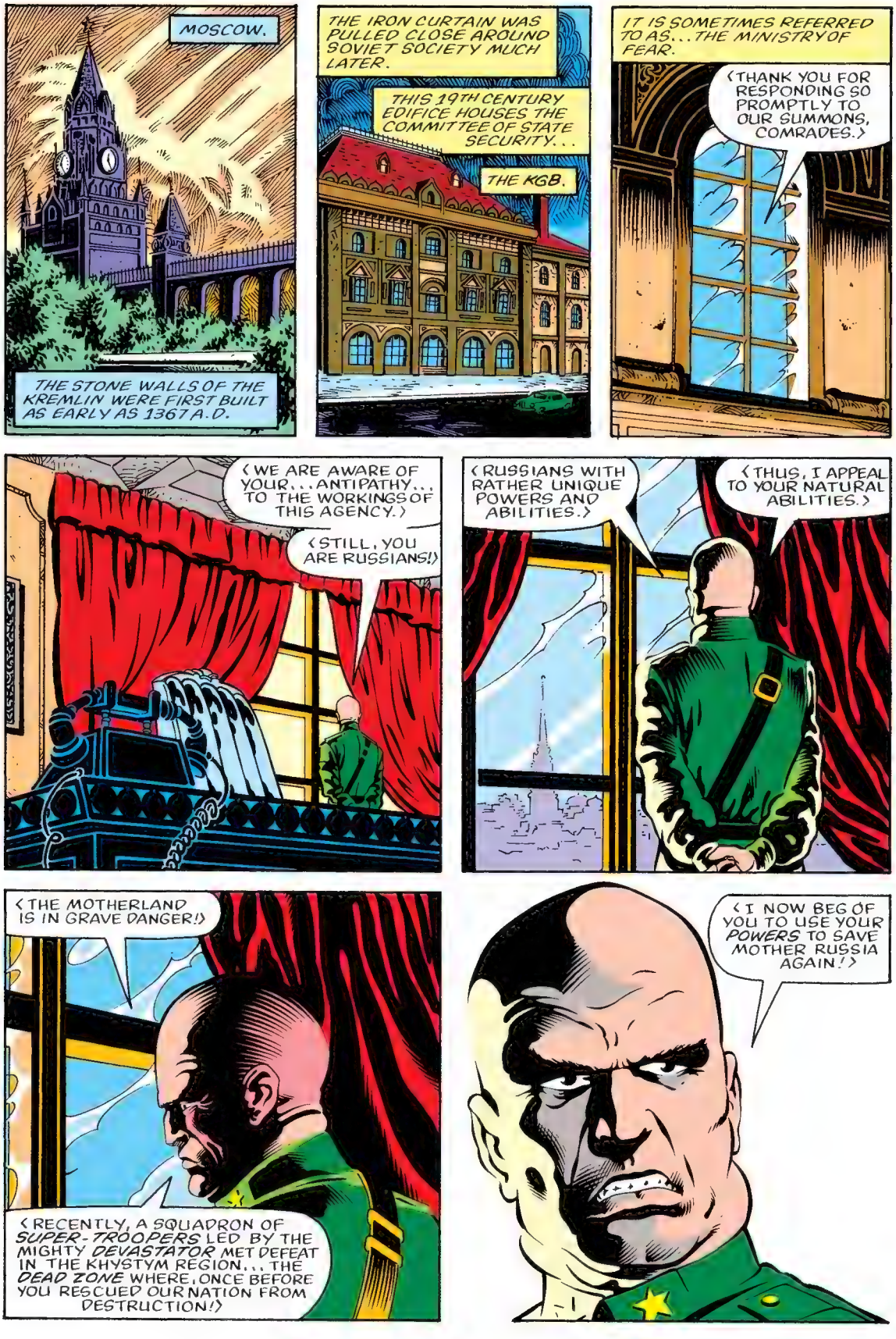
YES--FOUL, UTTERLY ABHORRENT, ALIEN... ALL ADJECTIVES TOO MILD TO DESCRIBE THOSE SHAPE-SHIFTING SCUM OF THE STARS!
STREAMING FORTH FROM THEIR DAMNABLE *DARK NEBULA*--

"--HOPING TO SNUFF OUT THE GOLDEN FLAME OF *GALADOR!*

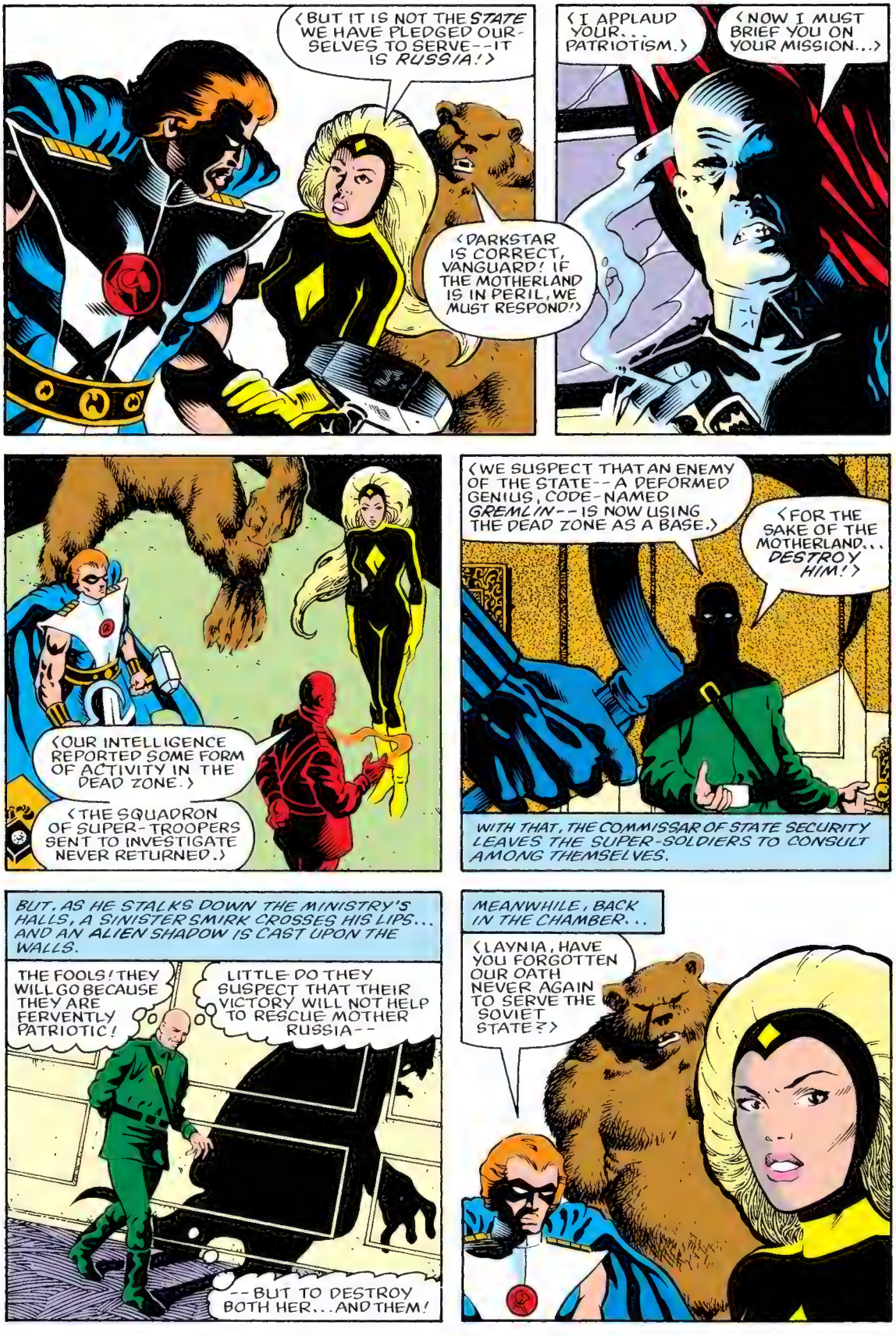

"THE FLOWER OF OUR YOUTH SACRIFICED THEIR HUMANITY TO BECOME *SPACEKNIGHTS* THAT WE MIGHT DRIVE THE WRAITH HORROR FROM OUR HOMEWORLD!
"WE SUCCEEDED! GALADOR WAS SAVED..."

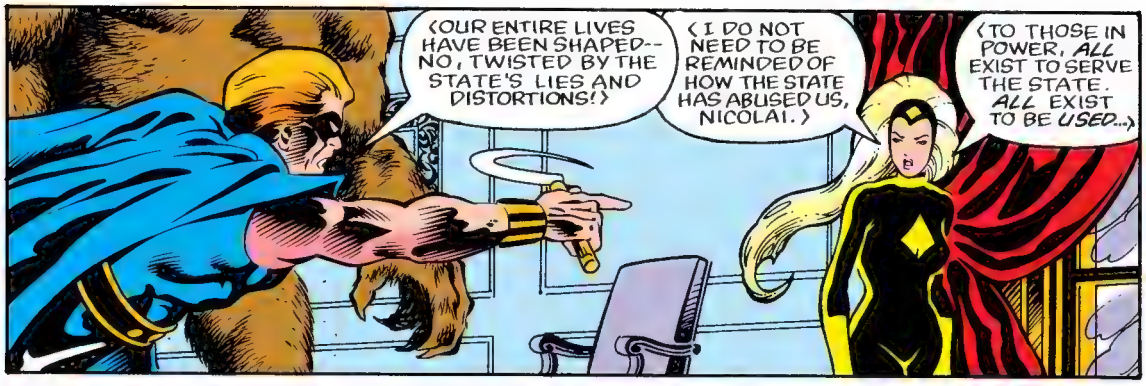

... BUT THE WRAITHS HAVE FLED TO OTHER WORLDS LESS CAPABLE OF DEFENDING THEMSELVES. WORLDS SUCH AS YOURS.
AND WE SPACEKNIGHTS KNEW THE WAR WOULD NEVER BE TRULY OVER--THAT WE COULD NEVER RECLAIM OUR LOST HUMANITY--
--UNTIL THOSE MYRIAD WORLDS WERE AS CLEANSED OF WRAITHKIND AS GALADOR WAS!


THESE WRAITHS, THEN, HAVE INFILTRATED EARTH. AND THEY ARE SHAPE-SHIFTERS, YOU SAY, ABLE TO TAKE ON HUMAN GUISE.
THAT MAY EXPLAIN MUCH!
"WE, IN THE SOVIET UNION HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A SUSPICIOUS PEOPLE, SPACE-KNIGHTS, CERTAIN THAT COUNTLESS ENEMIES WAITED TO ENGULF OUR NATION!
"SO PARANOID ARE WE THAT, AT TIMES, WE EVEN PURGE OUR OWN PEOPLE, FEARING THAT OUTSIDE ENEMIES HAVE MADE INROADS AMONG THEM.
"THAT PARANOIA WAS ALWAYS SELF-DESTRUCTIVE--DEPRIVING US OF SOME OF OUR FINEST MINDS.
"I, HOWEVER, WAS ALWAYS LEFT ALONE BECAUSE THE SOVIET STATE FEARED ME MORE THAN ANY FOREIGN FOE.
"RECENTLY, THAT CHANGED. SPIES WERE SET UPON ME.
"MY EVERY MOVE WAS WATCHED, MY RESEARCH MONITORED.
"BUT I SPIED UPON THE SPIES... AND DISCOVERED A SECRET SO AWESOME, SO UNBELIEVABLE--
"--THAT, UNWILLING TO ACCEPT IT AT FIRST, I FLED WITH MY KNOWLEDGE... FLED FOR MY LIFE!"
WHAT I LEARNED FITS WITH WHAT YOU HAVE SAID, SPACEKNIGHT!
THE CHANGE I DETECTED COMING OVER MY COMRADES WAS NOT A MANIFESTATION OF THEIR USUAL PARANOIA!
THEY WERE DISABLING THE MACHINERY OF STATE NOT OUT OF FEAR OF SOME UNKNOWN ENEMY--
--BUT BECAUSE THEY THEMSELVES WERE THE ENEMY. THE ENEMY WITHIN.
WRAITHS!
YES, INFILTRATING A SOCIETY USED TO PURGING ITSELF--AND THEN DOING THE PURGING FOR IT.
BUT THEY REMOVED SOME OF THOSE WHO WERE LOYAL, WHO SERVED THE STATE WELL!
THIS WAS DONE TO DESTABILIZE YOUR SOCIETY, GREMLIN, THAT WRAITHKIND MIGHT ONE DAY SOON TAKE OVER.


MOSCOW.
THE STONE WALLS OF THE KREMLIN WERE FIRST BUILT AS EARLY AS 1367 A.D.
THE IRON CURTAIN WAS PULLED CLOSE AROUND SOVIET SOCIETY MUCH LATER.
THIS 19TH CENTURY EDIFICE HOUSES THE COMMITTEE OF STATE SECURITY...
THE KGB.
IT IS SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS... THE MINISTRY OF FEAR.
〈THANK YOU FOR RESPONDING SO PROMPTLY TO OUR SUMMONS, COMRADES.〉
〈WE ARE AWARE OF YOUR... ANTIPATHY... TO THE WORKINGS OF THIS AGENCY.〉
〈STILL, YOU ARE RUSSIANS!〉
〈RUSSIANS WITH RATHER UNIQUE POWERS AND ABILITIES.〉
〈THUS, I APPEAL TO YOUR NATURAL ABILITIES.〉
〈THE MOTHERLAND IS IN GRAVE DANGER!〉
〈RECENTLY, A SQUADRON OF SUPER-TROOPERS LED BY THE MIGHTY DEVASTATOR MET DEFEAT IN THE KHYSTYM REGION... THE DEAD ZONE WHERE, ONCE BEFORE YOU RESCUED OUR NATION FROM DESTRUCTION!〉
〈I NOW BEG OF YOU TO USE YOUR POWERS TO SAVE MOTHER RUSSIA AGAIN!〉

〈ONLY THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS CAN TRIUMPH OVER THE ENEMY WE FACE NOW!〉
〈WELL, VANGUARD, MAJOR URSUS, DARKSTAR-- WILL YOU RUSH TO THE AID OF YOUR COUNTRY?〉
〈DOES THE ARROGANCE OF THE STATE KNOW NO BOUNDS, COMRADE?〉
〈YOU DARE ASK OUR HELP-- YOU WHO FEAR OUR POWER SO MUCH THAT YOU HAVE ALREADY TRIED TO DESTROY US!*〉
〈THE STATE FEARS US, MY BROTHER, BECAUSE IT CANNOT CONTROL US!〉
*FOR A MORE COMPLETE CHRONICLE OF THE SUPER-SOLDIERS' GRIEVANCES, SEE THE INCREDIBLE HULK #258-259-- RESEARCHIN' RALPH.


〈BUT IT IS NOT THE STATE WE HAVE PLEDGED OURSELVES TO SERVE--IT IS RUSSIA!〉
〈DARKSTAR IS CORRECT, VANGUARD! IF THE MOTHERLAND IS IN PERIL, WE MUST RESPOND!〉
〈I APPLAUD YOUR... PATRIOTISM.〉
〈NOW I MUST BRIEF YOU ON YOUR MISSION...〉
〈OUR INTELLIGENCE REPORTED SOME FORM OF ACTIVITY IN THE DEAD ZONE.〉
〈THE SQUADRON OF SUPER-TROOPERS SENT TO INVESTIGATE NEVER RETURNED.〉
〈WE SUSPECT THAT AN ENEMY OF THE STATE--A DEFORMED GENIUS, CODE-NAMED GREMLIN--IS NOW USING THE DEAD ZONE AS A BASE.〉
〈FOR THE SAKE OF THE MOTHERLAND... DESTROY HIM!〉
WITH THAT, THE COMMISSAR OF STATE SECURITY LEAVES THE SUPER-SOLDIERS TO CONSULT AMONG THEMSELVES.
BUT, AS HE STALKS DOWN THE MINISTRY'S HALLS, A SINISTER SMIRK CROSSES HIS LIPS... AND AN ALIEN SHADOW IS CAST UPON THE WALLS.
THE FOOLS! THEY WILL GO BECAUSE THEY ARE FERVENTLY PATRIOTIC!
LITTLE DO THEY SUSPECT THAT THEIR VICTORY WILL NOT HELP TO RESCUE MOTHER RUSSIA--
--BUT TO DESTROY BOTH HER...AND THEM!
MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE CHAMBER...
〈LAYNIA, HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN OUR OATH NEVER AGAIN TO SERVE THE SOVIET STATE?〉


〈OUR ENTIRE LIVES HAVE BEEN SHAPED--NO, TWISTED BY THE STATE'S LIES AND DISTORTIONS!〉
〈I DO NOT NEED TO BE REMINDED OF HOW THE STATE HAS ABUSED US, NICOLAI.〉
〈TO THOSE IN POWER, ALL EXIST TO SERVE THE STATE. ALL EXIST TO BE USED...〉

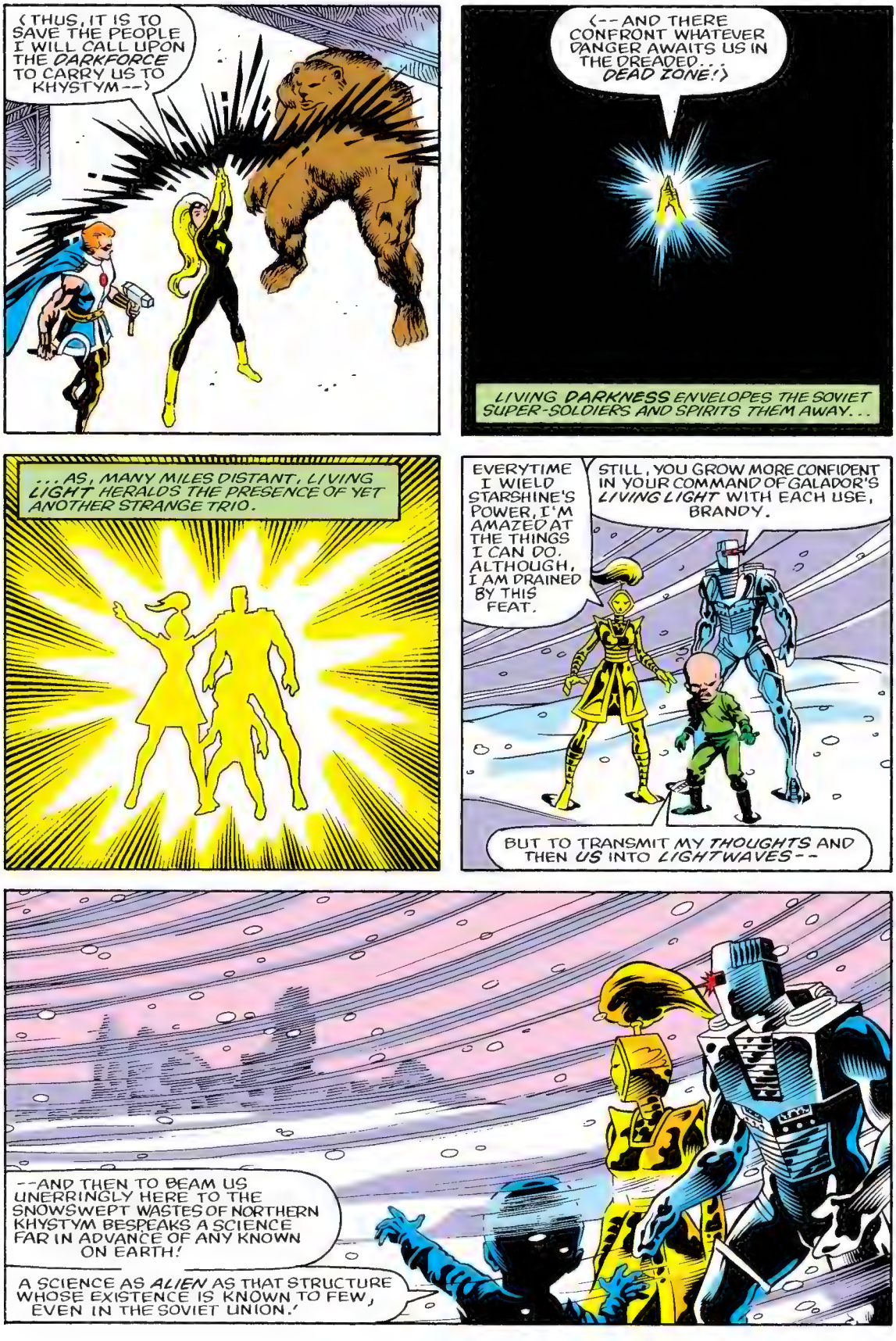
〈"...AS THEY USED OUR FATHER, SERGEI, SECURING THE SERVICES OF HIS SCIENTIFIC GENIUS BY LYING TO HIM THAT WE, HIS CHILDREN--HAD DIED IN CHILDBIRTH ALONG WITH HIS BELOVED WIFE.〉

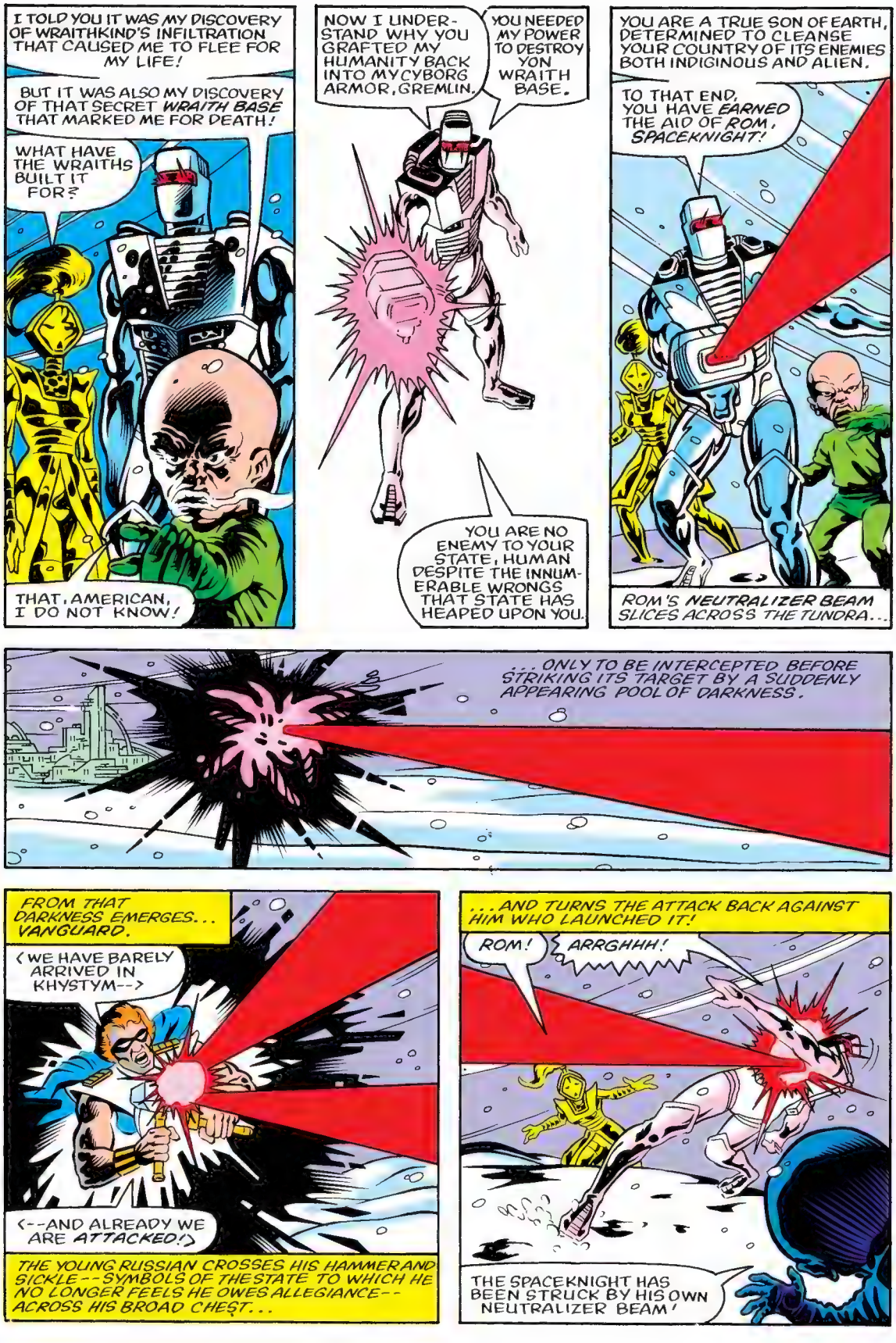
〈"NOR COULD I FORGET HOW WE--MANIFESTING MUTANT POWERS EVEN AS INFANTS--WERE ENTRUSTED TO THE 'CARE' OF PROFESSOR PHOBOS... NOT TO BE TRAINED AS WE WERE LED TO BELIEVE--〉
〈"--BUT TO BE MONITORED, SPIED ON, CONTROLLED!〉

〈"FINALLY, WHEN OUR FATHER ASSUMED THE IDENTITY OF THE PRESENCE ATTEMPTING TO SAVE THE STATE IN HIS OWN WAY... THE SOVIETS MISUNDERSTOOD, AND SET US AGAINST HIM."〉

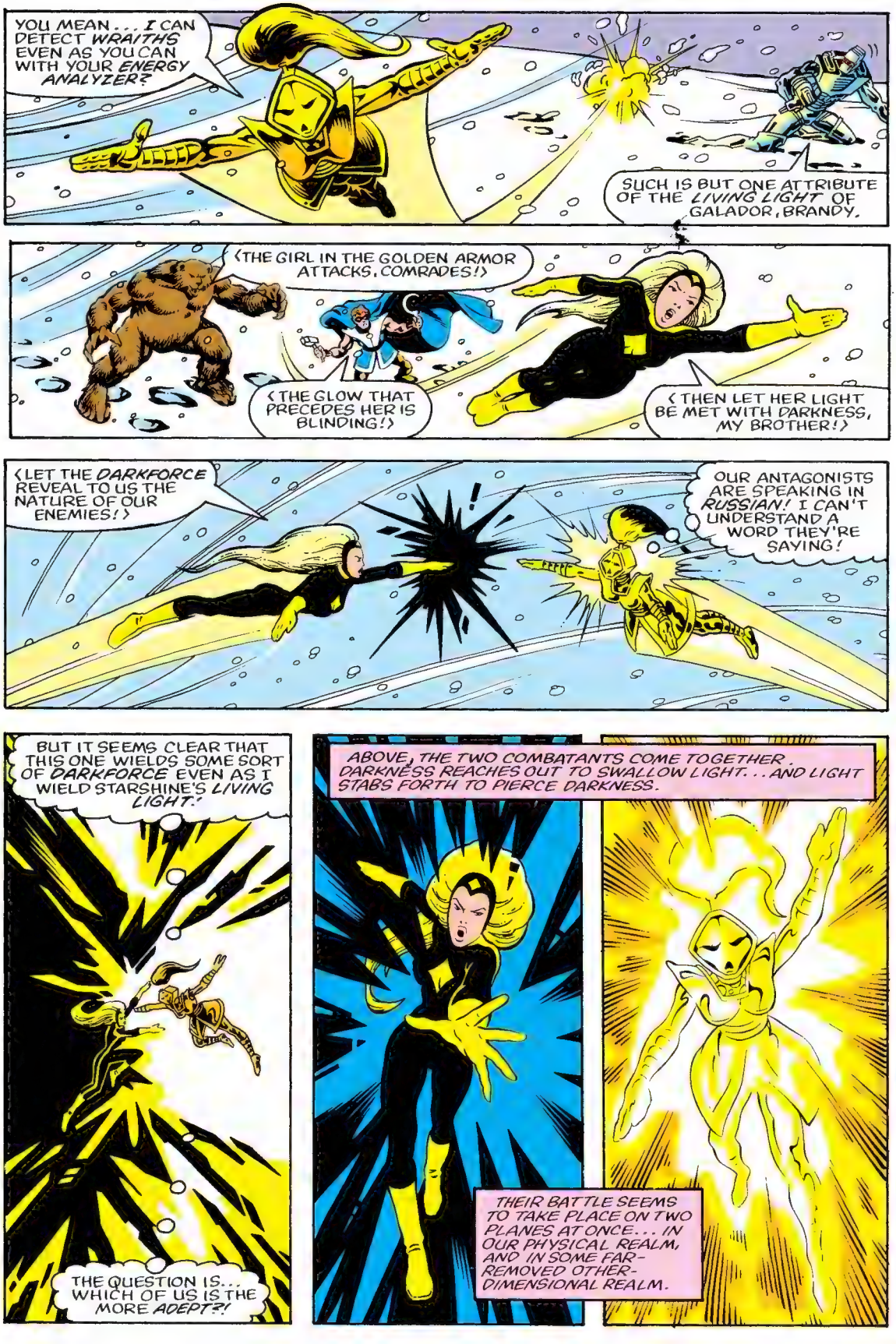
〈THE STATE HAD INVOLVED US IN TREACHEROUS ACTIVITIES.〉
〈AND THEN WE WERE TURNED AGAINST THE STATE, OURSELVES, BY OUR TUTOR, PROFESSOR PHOBOS.〉

〈THE TRUTH FREED US, VANGUARD. NOW WE SERVE ONLY EACH OTHER.〉
〈AND THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE.〉
〈YES. THEY CANNOT BE CONDEMNED FOR THE CRIMES OF THE STATE.〉

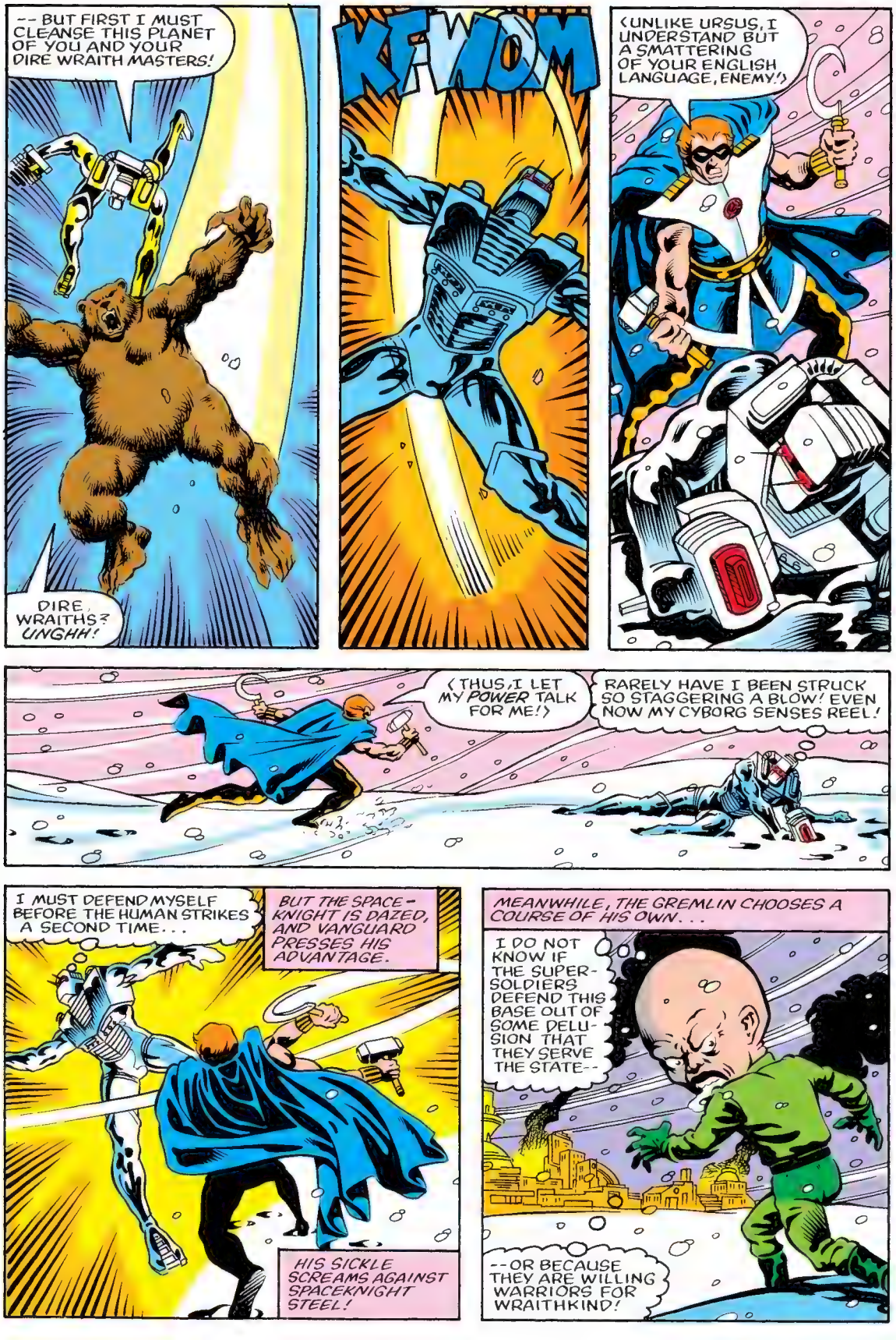

〈THUS, IT IS TO SAVE THE PEOPLE I WILL CALL UPON THE *DARKFORCE* TO CARRY US TO KHYSTYM--〉
〈--AND THERE CONFRONT WHATEVER DANGER AWAITS US IN THE DREADED... *DEAD ZONE!*〉
LIVING **DARKNESS** *ENVELOPES THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS AND SPIRITS THEM AWAY...*
...AS, MANY MILES DISTANT, LIVING LIGHT HERALDS THE PRESENCE OF YET ANOTHER STRANGE TRIO.
EVERYTIME I WIELD STARSHINE'S POWER, I'M AMAZED AT THE THINGS I CAN DO. ALTHOUGH, I AM DRAINED BY THIS FEAT.
STILL, YOU GROW MORE CONFIDENT IN YOUR COMMAND OF GALADOR'S *LIVING LIGHT* WITH EACH USE, BRANDY.
BUT TO TRANSMIT MY *THOUGHTS* AND THEN *US* INTO *LIGHTWAVES*--
--AND THEN TO BEAM US UNERRINGLY HERE TO THE SNOWSWEPT WASTES OF NORTHERN KHYSTYM BESPEAKS A SCIENCE FAR IN ADVANCE OF ANY KNOWN ON EARTH!
A SCIENCE AS *ALIEN* AS THAT STRUCTURE WHOSE EXISTENCE IS KNOWN TO FEW, EVEN IN THE SOVIET UNION.'

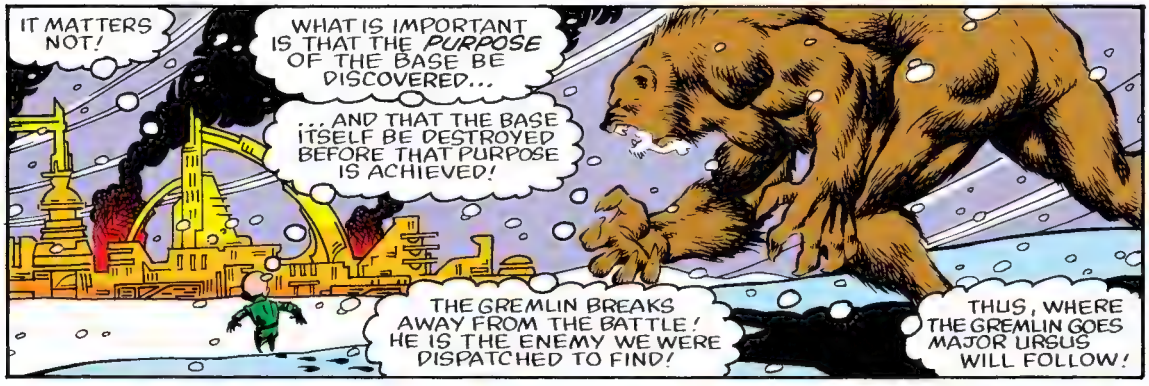

I TOLD YOU IT WAS MY DISCOVERY OF WRAITHKIND'S INFILTRATION THAT CAUSED ME TO FLEE FOR MY LIFE!
BUT IT WAS ALSO MY DISCOVERY OF THAT SECRET WRAITH BASE THAT MARKED ME FOR DEATH!
WHAT HAVE THE WRAITHS BUILT IT FOR?
THAT, AMERICAN, I DO NOT KNOW!
NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU GRAFTED MY HUMANITY BACK INTO MY CYBORG ARMOR, GREMLIN.
YOU NEEDED MY POWER TO DESTROY YON WRAITH BASE.
YOU ARE NO ENEMY TO YOUR STATE, HUMAN DESPITE THE INNUMERABLE WRONGS THAT STATE HAS HEAPED UPON YOU.
YOU ARE A TRUE SON OF EARTH, DETERMINED TO CLEANSE YOUR COUNTRY OF ITS ENEMIES BOTH INDIGINOUS AND ALIEN.
TO THAT END, YOU HAVE EARNED THE AID OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER BEAM SLICES ACROSS THE TUNDRA...
...ONLY TO BE INTERCEPTED BEFORE STRIKING ITS TARGET BY A SUDDENLY APPEARING POOL OF DARKNESS.
FROM THAT DARKNESS EMERGES... VANGUARD.
<WE HAVE BARELY ARRIVED IN KHYSTYM-->
<--AND ALREADY WE ARE ATTACKED!>
THE YOUNG RUSSIAN CROSSES HIS HAMMER AND SICKLE--SYMBOLS OF THE STATE TO WHICH HE NO LONGER FEELS HE OWES ALLEGIANCE--ACROSS HIS BROAD CHEST...
...AND TURNS THE ATTACK BACK AGAINST HIM WHO LAUNCHED IT!
ROM!
ARRGHHH!
THE SPACEKNIGHT HAS BEEN STRUCK BY HIS OWN NEUTRALIZER BEAM!

AND THOSE WHO HAVE HARMED HIM--THE SOVIET SUPER SOLDIERS--STAND BETWEEN THE STRICKEN SPACEKNIGHT AND THE SALVATION OF THE SOVIET UNION!
〈THE DARKFORCE HAS LED US UNERRINGLY TO THE ENEMY OF THE STATE AND HIS ALIEN ALLIES, COMRADES!〉
〈THEY SEEK TO DESTROY SOME SECRET INSTALLATION THAT UNDOUBTEDLY STANDS TO SAFEGUARD THE MOTHERLAND!〉
〈OR PERHAPS THE BASE SERVES SOME SINISTER PURPOSE OF THE STATE, ITSELF, VANGUARD!〉
ROM! A GROUP OF SUPER-POWERFUL BEINGS IS MATERIALIZING BETWEEN US AND THE WRAITH BASE.
ARE THEY HUMAN, OR CREATURES OF WRAITHKIND?
USE YOUR LIGHTEYES, BRANDY! LET THEIR LUMINESCENCE PENETRATE TO THE RECESSES OF OUR OPPONENTS' SOULS!

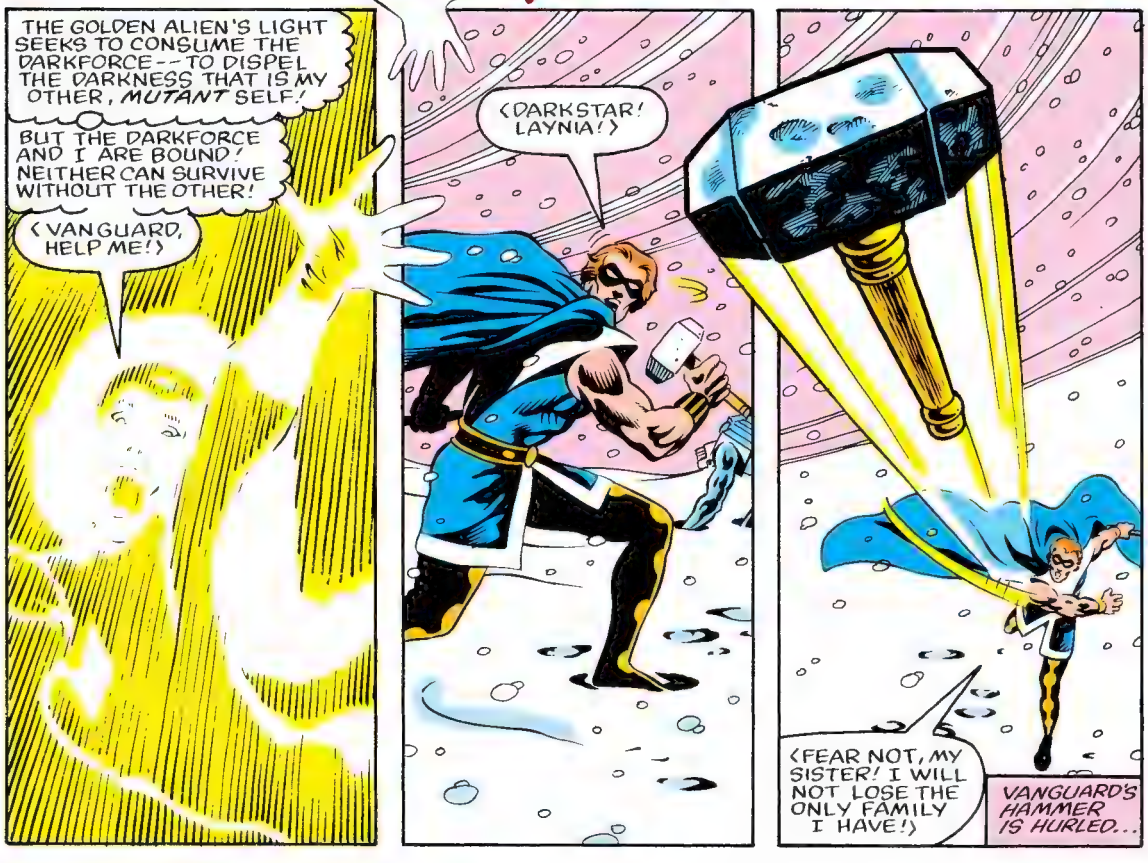

YOU MEAN... I CAN DETECT WRAITHS EVEN AS YOU CAN WITH YOUR ENERGY ANALYZER?
SUCH IS BUT ONE ATTRIBUTE OF THE LIVING LIGHT OF GALADOR, BRANDY.
〈THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ARMOR ATTACKS, COMRADES!〉
〈THE GLOW THAT PRECEDES HER IS BLINDING!〉
〈THEN LET HER LIGHT BE MET WITH DARKNESS, MY BROTHER!〉
〈LET THE DARKFORCE REVEAL TO US THE NATURE OF OUR ENEMIES!〉
OUR ANTAGONISTS ARE SPEAKING IN RUSSIAN! I CAN'T UNDERSTAND A WORD THEY'RE SAYING!
BUT IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THIS ONE WIELDS SOME SORT OF DARKFORCE EVEN AS I WIELD STARSHINE'S LIVING LIGHT!
THE QUESTION IS... WHICH OF US IS THE MORE ADEPT?!
ABOVE, THE TWO COMBATANTS COME TOGETHER. DARKNESS REACHES OUT TO SWALLOW LIGHT... AND LIGHT STABS FORTH TO PIERCE DARKNESS.
THEIR BATTLE SEEMS TO TAKE PLACE ON TWO PLANES AT ONCE... IN OUR PHYSICAL REALM, AND IN SOME FAR-REMOVED OTHER-DIMENSIONAL REALM.

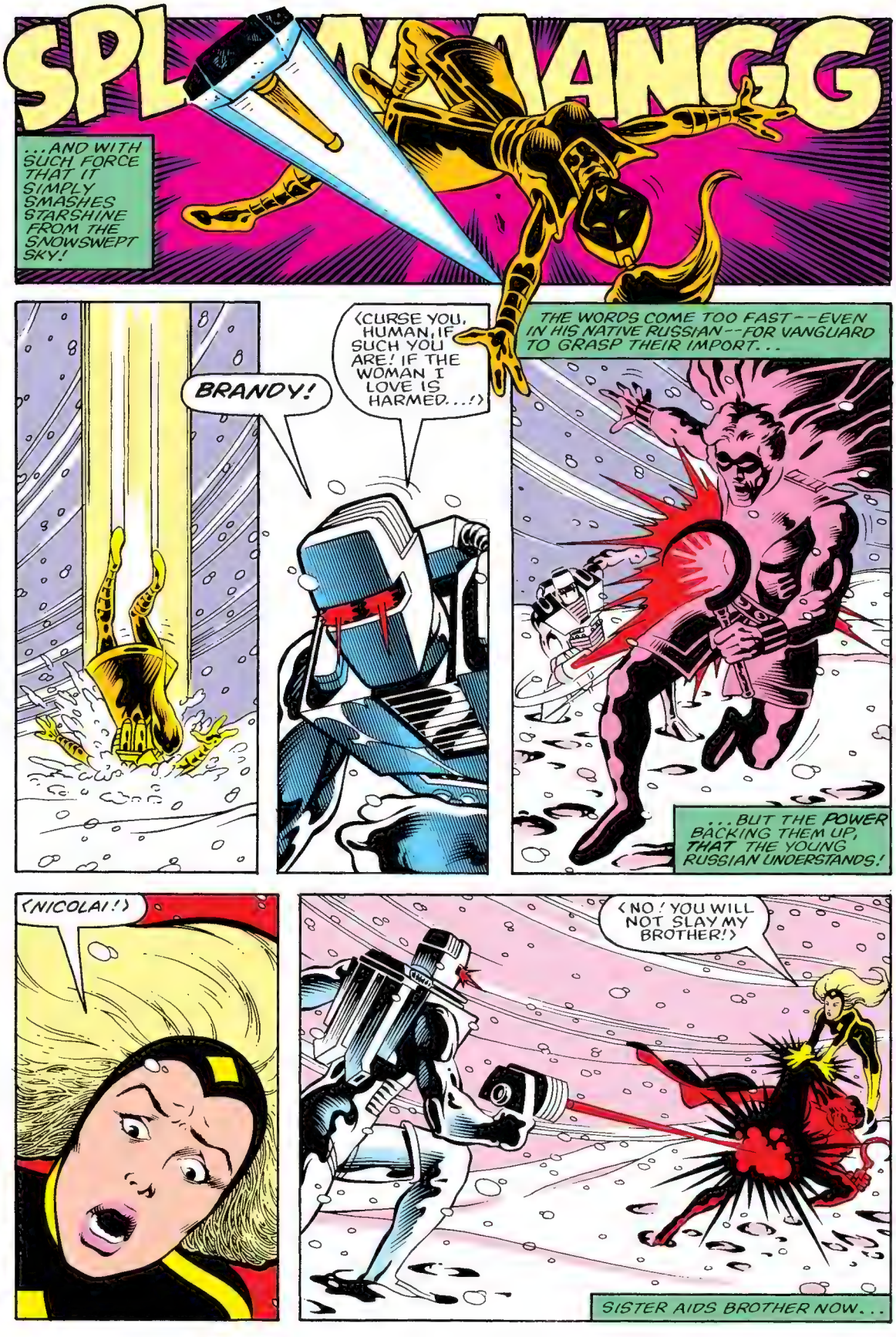
THERE, DARKFORCE AND LIVING LIGHT CLASH... ENERGIES ULTIMATELY BEYOND THE CONTROL OF TWO WHO PURPORTEDLY COMMAND THEM.
SENSING THAT THEIR POWERS ARE BEYOND THEM, BOTH YOUNG WOMEN TREMBLE.
FOR THEY BEGIN TO PERCEIVE THAT THEIR RENEGADE POWERS ARE LOCKED IN THE PRIMAL STRUGGLE OF OPPOSITES WHICH WILL NOT END UNTIL THEY HAVE CONSUMED EACH OTHER.
BRANDY IS A NOVICE WHEN IT COMES TO SUCH STRUGGLES. I MUST AID HER!
<YOU WILL AID NO ONE, MAN OF METAL!>
<FOR, YOU SEE, YOU HAVE TROUBLES OF YOUR OWN!>
SOME SORT OF MAN-BEAST, GRASPING ME, IN A CRUSHING EMBRACE!
I JUST REALIZED... YOU SPEAK ENGLISH! HAS THE GREMLIN ALLIED HIMSELF WITH THE AMERICANS?!
I SPEAK WHATEVER LANGUAGES MY TRANSLATOR HAS ENABLED ME TO MASTER, MAN-BEAST!
BUT MY TRUE TONGUE IS GALADORIAN, AND HOW I LONG TO SPEAK IT--

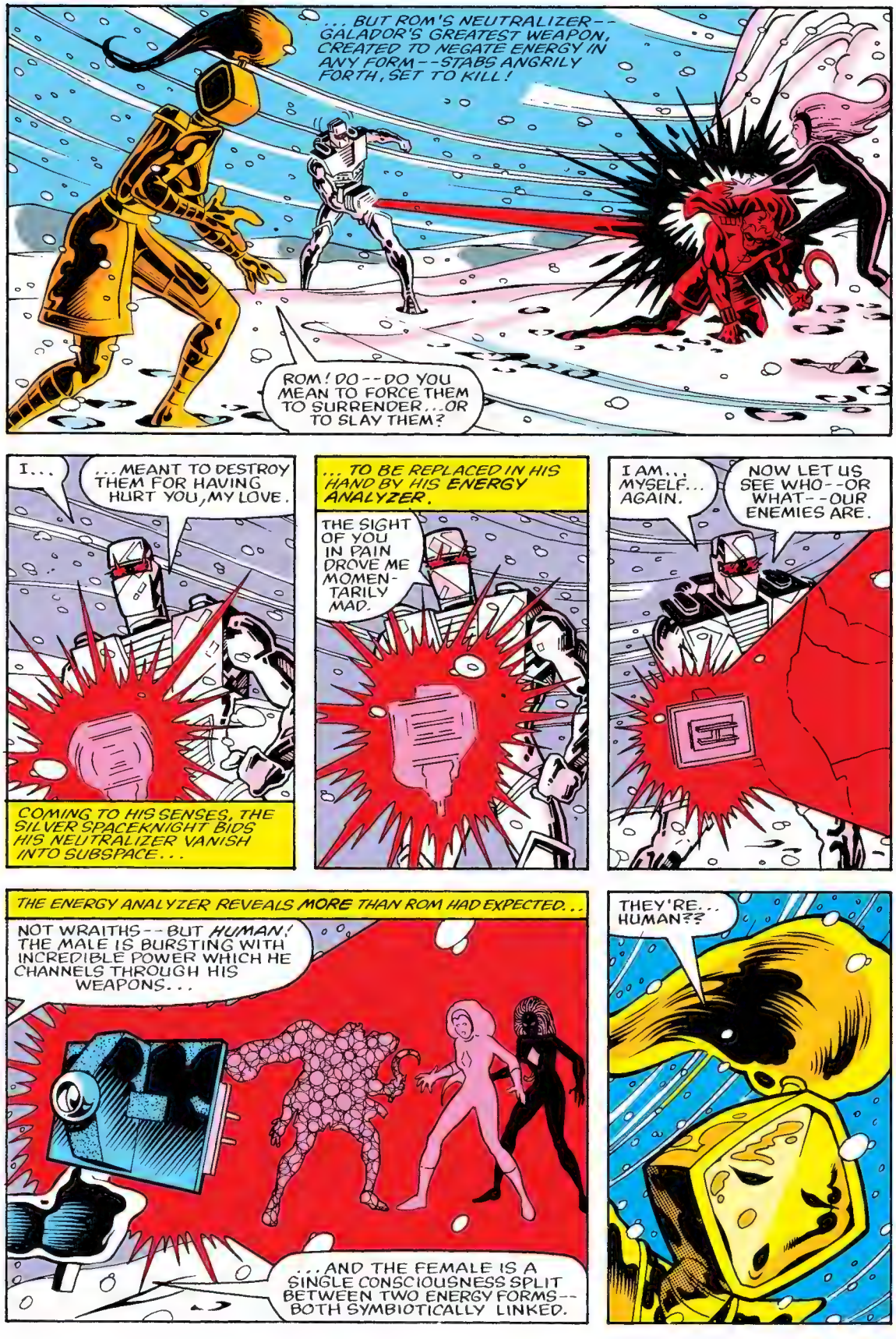

-- BUT FIRST I MUST CLEANSE THIS PLANET OF YOU AND YOUR DIRE WRAITH MASTERS!
DIRE WRAITHS? UNGHH!
KRYOM
〈UNLIKE URSUS, I UNDERSTAND BUT A SMATTERING OF YOUR ENGLISH LANGUAGE, ENEMY!〉
〈THUS, I LET MY POWER TALK FOR ME!〉
RARELY HAVE I BEEN STRUCK SO STAGGERING A BLOW! EVEN NOW MY CYBORG SENSES REEL!
I MUST DEFEND MYSELF BEFORE THE HUMAN STRIKES A SECOND TIME...
BUT THE SPACE-KNIGHT IS DAZED, AND VANGUARD PRESSES HIS ADVANTAGE.
HIS SICKLE SCREAMS AGAINST SPACEKNIGHT STEEL!
MEANWHILE, THE GREMLIN CHOOSES A COURSE OF HIS OWN...
I DO NOT KNOW IF THE SUPER-SOLDIERS DEFEND THIS BASE OUT OF SOME DELUSION THAT THEY SERVE THE STATE--
--OR BECAUSE THEY ARE WILLING WARRIORS FOR WRAITHKIND!

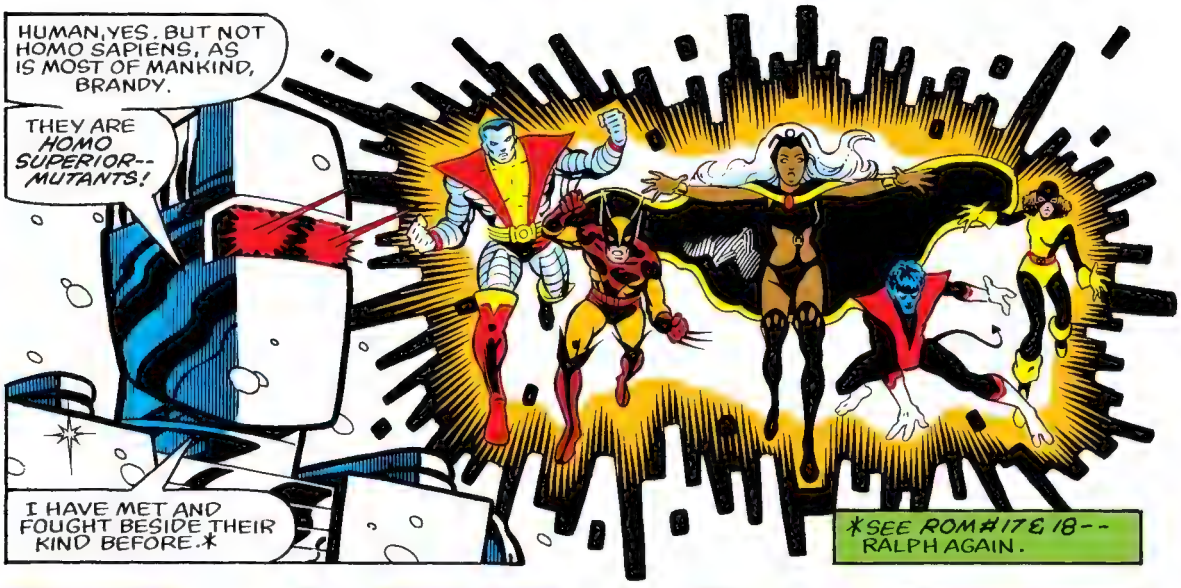

IT MATTERS NOT!
WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE BASE BE DISCOVERED...
...AND THAT THE BASE ITSELF BE DESTROYED BEFORE THAT PURPOSE IS ACHIEVED!
THE GREMLIN BREAKS AWAY FROM THE BATTLE! HE IS THE ENEMY WE WERE DISPATCHED TO FIND!
THUS, WHERE THE GREMLIN GOES MAJOR URSUS WILL FOLLOW!

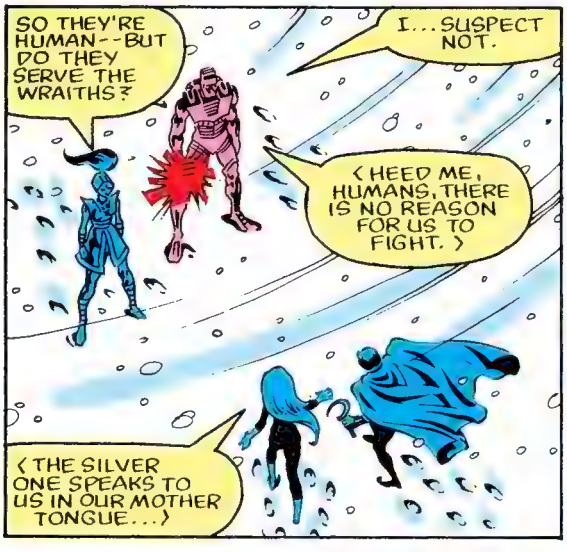
MEANWHILE, HIGH ABOVE...
OHHHHH!
OHH!
AS THE DARKNESS CREPT UPON ME--CHILLING MY SOUL--I UNLEASHED THE LIVING LIGHT IN ALL ITS FURY!
AND FROM SHE WHO IS STRICKEN BY IT COMES NOT ONE BUT--TWO!


THE GOLDEN ALIEN'S LIGHT SEEKS TO CONSUME THE DARKFORCE--TO DISPEL THE DARKNESS THAT IS MY OTHER, MUTANT SELF!
BUT THE DARKFORCE AND I ARE BOUND! NEITHER CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT THE OTHER!
(VANGUARD, HELP ME!)
(DARKSTAR! LAYNIA!)
(FEAR NOT, MY SISTER! I WILL NOT LOSE THE ONLY FAMILY I HAVE!)
VANGUARD'S HAMMER IS HURLED...

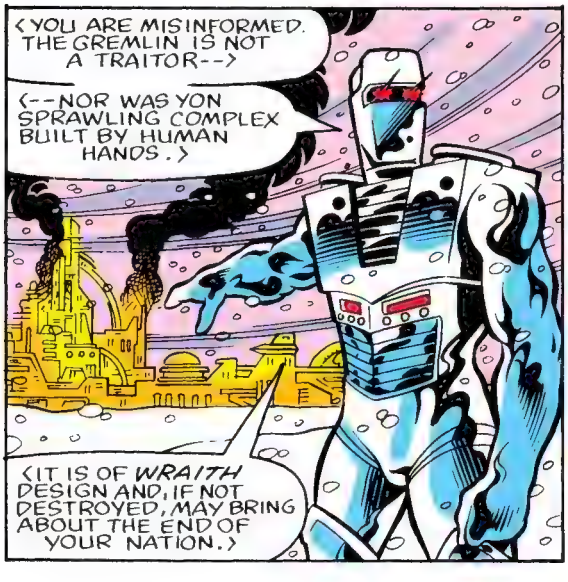

SPLANGG
...AND WITH SUCH FORCE THAT IT SIMPLY SMASHES STARSHINE FROM THE SNOWSWEPT SKY!
BRANDY!
(CURSE YOU, HUMAN, IF SUCH YOU ARE! IF THE WOMAN I LOVE IS HARMED...!)
THE WORDS COME TOO FAST--EVEN IN HIS NATIVE RUSSIAN--FOR VANGUARD TO GRASP THEIR IMPORT...
...BUT THE POWER BACKING THEM UP, THAT THE YOUNG RUSSIAN UNDERSTANDS!
(NICOLAI!)
(NO! YOU WILL NOT SLAY MY BROTHER!)
SISTER AIDS BROTHER NOW...


... BUT ROM'S NEUTRALIZER--GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON, CREATED TO NEGATE ENERGY IN ANY FORM--STABS ANGRILY FORTH, SET TO KILL!
ROM! DO--DO YOU MEAN TO FORCE THEM TO SURRENDER...OR TO SLAY THEM?
I...
...MEANT TO DESTROY THEM FOR HAVING HURT YOU, MY LOVE.
COMING TO HIS SENSES, THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT BIDS HIS NEUTRALIZER VANISH INTO SUBSPACE...
...TO BE REPLACED IN HIS HAND BY HIS ENERGY ANALYZER.
THE SIGHT OF YOU IN PAIN DROVE ME MOMENTARILY MAD.
I AM... MYSELF... AGAIN.
NOW LET US SEE WHO--OR WHAT--OUR ENEMIES ARE.
THE ENERGY ANALYZER REVEALS MORE THAN ROM HAD EXPECTED...
NOT WRAITHS--BUT HUMAN! THE MALE IS BURSTING WITH INCREDIBLE POWER WHICH HE CHANNELS THROUGH HIS WEAPONS...
...AND THE FEMALE IS A SINGLE CONSCIOUSNESS SPLIT BETWEEN TWO ENERGY FORMS--BOTH SYMBIOTICALLY LINKED.
THEY'RE... HUMAN??


HUMAN, YES. BUT NOT HOMO SAPIENS, AS IS MOST OF MANKIND, BRANDY.
THEY ARE HOMO SUPERIOR--MUTANTS!
I HAVE MET AND FOUGHT BESIDE THEIR KIND BEFORE.*
*SEE ROM #17 & 18--RALPH AGAIN.

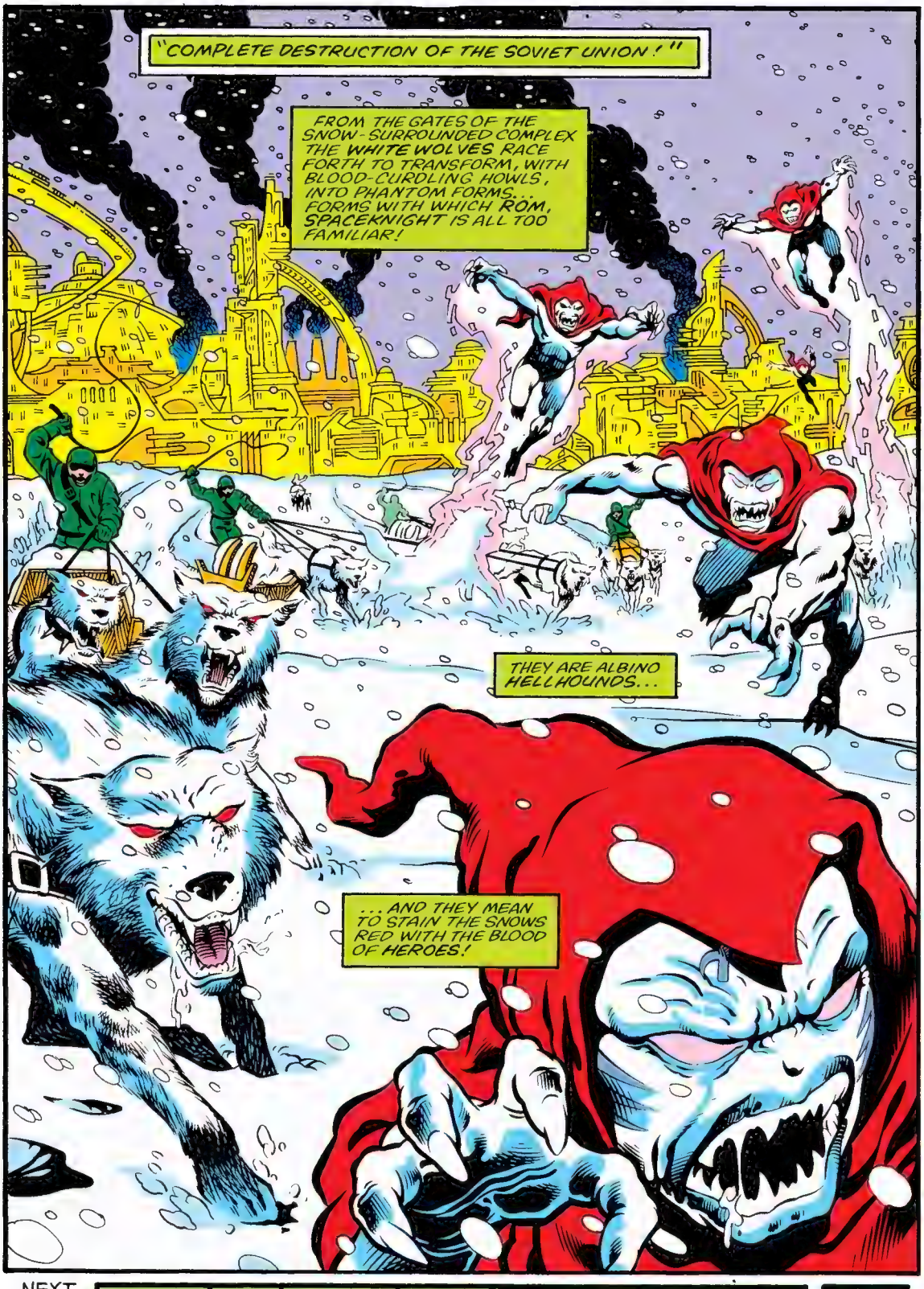

SO THEY'RE HUMAN--BUT DO THEY SERVE THE WRAITHS?
I...SUSPECT NOT.
〈HEED ME, HUMANS, THERE IS NO REASON FOR US TO FIGHT.〉
〈THE SILVER ONE SPEAKS TO US IN OUR MOTHER TONGUE...〉

〈IT IS A TRICK--MEANT TO DISARM US!〉
〈WE CAME TO PREVENT AN ENEMY OF THE STATE FROM DESTROYING A STRATEGIC BASE.〉
〈HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT YOU ARE NOT OUR ENEMIES WHEN YOU ARE OBVIOUSLY ALLIED WITH ONE WHO IS?〉

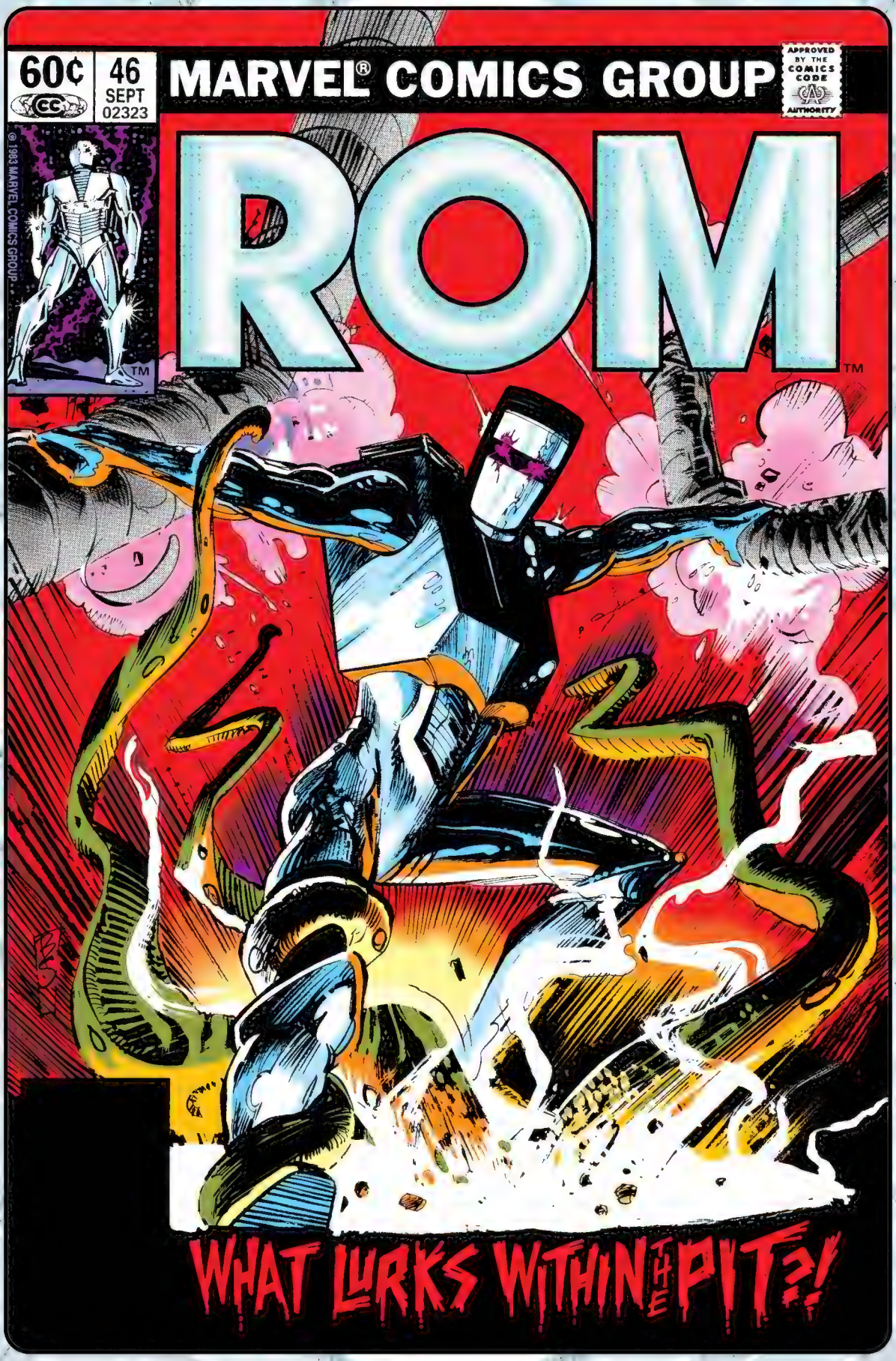

〈YOU ARE MISINFORMED. THE GREMLIN IS NOT A TRAITOR--〉
〈--NOR WAS YON SPRAWLING COMPLEX BUILT BY HUMAN HANDS.〉
〈IT IS OF WRAITH DESIGN AND, IF NOT DESTROYED, MAY BRING ABOUT THE END OF YOUR NATION.〉

〈BELIEVE HIM! HE SPEAKS THE TRUTH!〉
〈A VOICE--CRYING OUT IN PAIN!〉

〈PAIN? YES... BUT PAIN WAS THE *LEAST* OF THE HORRORS I SUFFERED WHEN I DARED ENTER THE BASE WE CAME TO DEFEND!〉
HURT BADLY, THE MARTIAL MUTANT LOSES CONTROL OVER HIS BEAR-FORM...
...AND BECOMES A MAN AGAIN.
〈WHO INFLICTED SUCH INJURIES ON YOU, MY COMRADE?〉
〈THINGS -- *THINGS* THE LIKE OF WHICH I HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE!〉
〈*HORRIBLE* THINGS, BEING BRED IN UNTOLD NUMBERS, FOR ONE PURPOSE AND ONE PURPOSE ONLY!〉


"COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE SOVIET UNION!"
FROM THE GATES OF THE SNOW-SURROUNDED COMPLEX THE WHITE WOLVES RACE FORTH TO TRANSFORM, WITH BLOOD-CURDLING HOWLS, INTO PHANTOM FORMS... FORMS WITH WHICH ROM, SPACEKNIGHT IS ALL TOO FAMILIAR!
THEY ARE ALBINO HELLHOUNDS...
...AND THEY MEAN TO STAIN THE SNOWS RED WITH THE BLOOD OF HEROES!

NEXT MONTH **BESTIARY!**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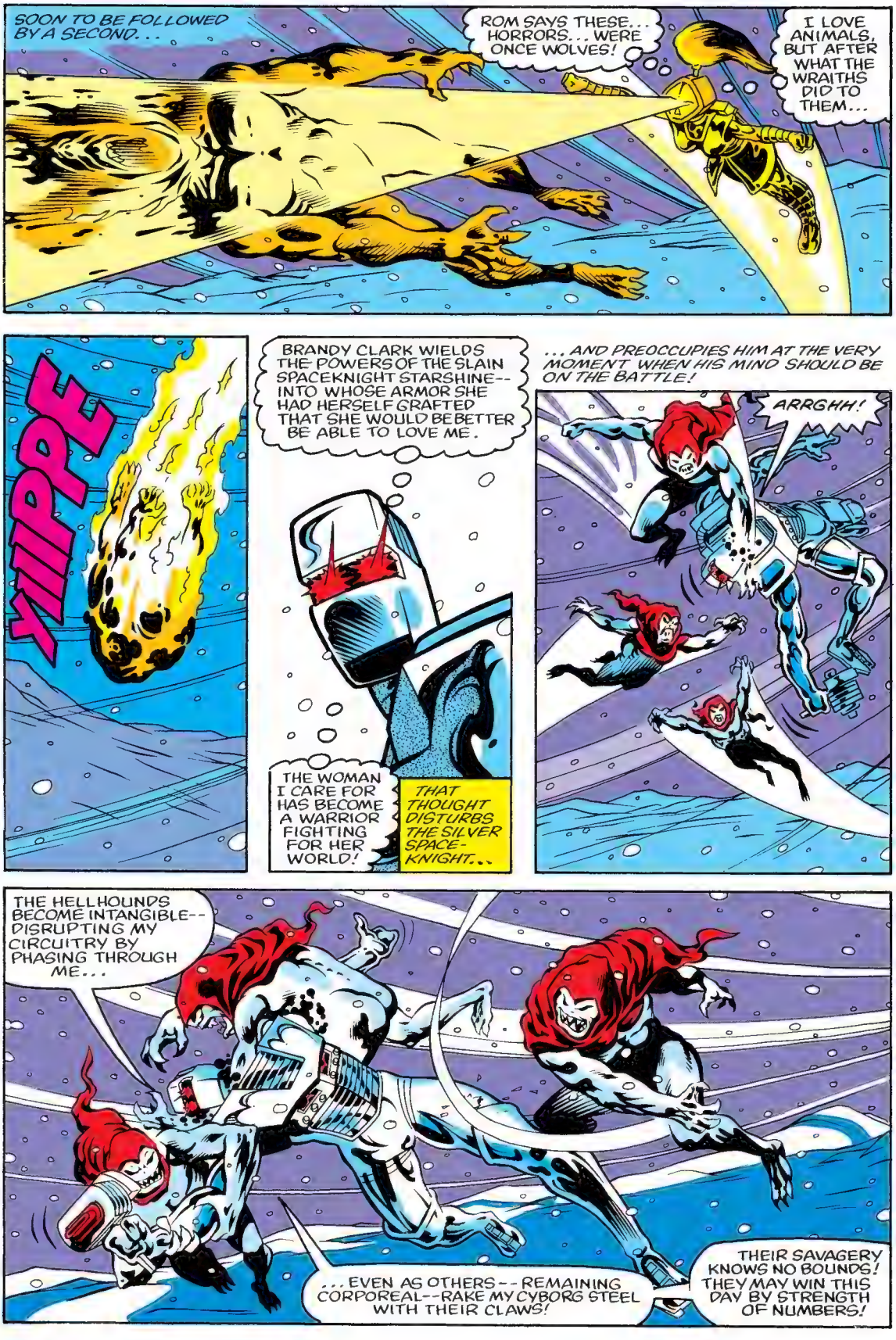
ROM™
WHAT LURKS WITHIN THE PIT?!

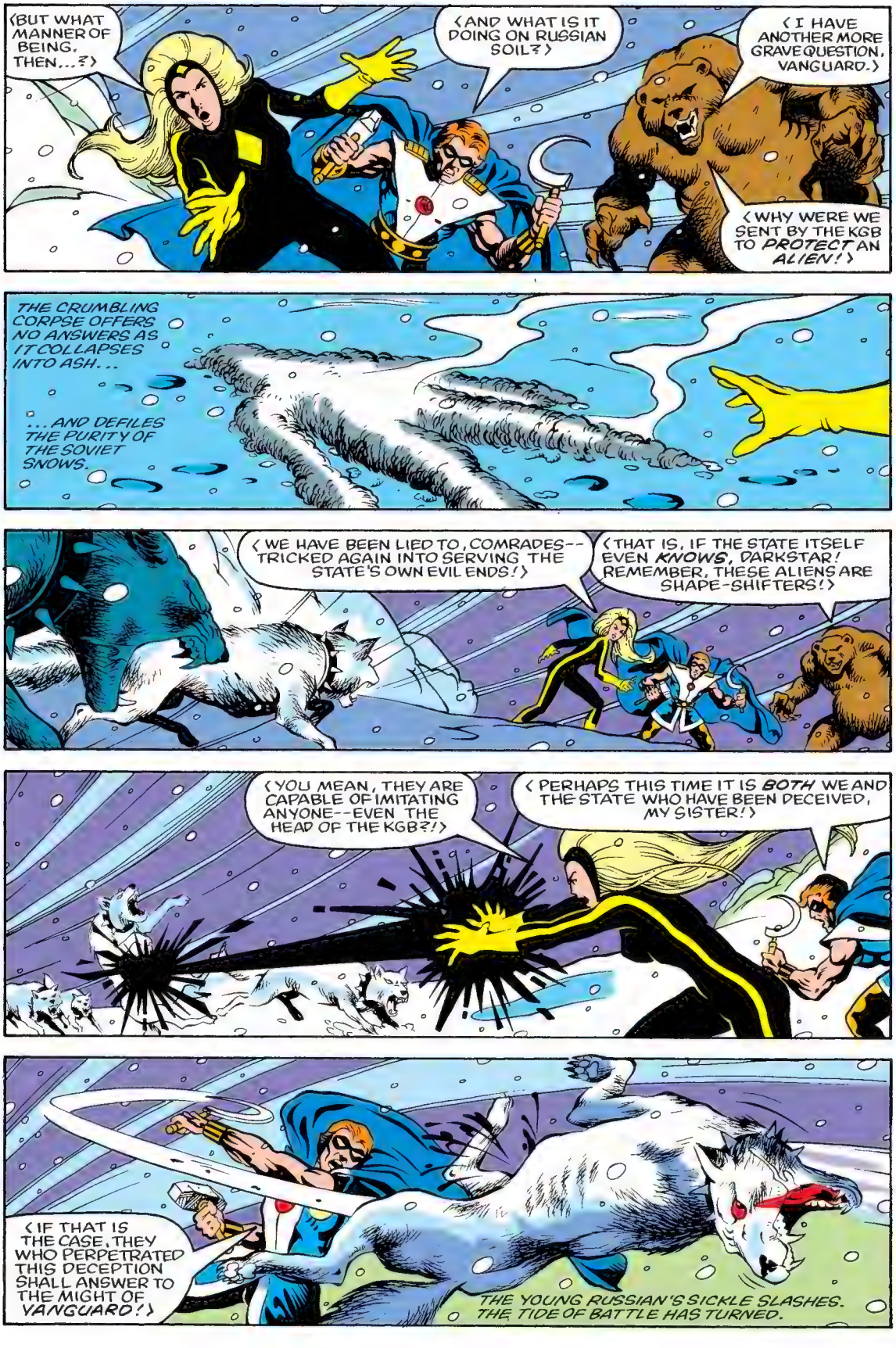
STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPT
SAL BUSCEMA PENCILS
AKIN & GARVEY INKS
JANICE CHIANG LETTERS
BEN SEAN COLORS
RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER PRIME DIRECTOR
BESTIARY!
THE SEPULCHRAL SILENCE OF THIS BLEAK SOVIET LANDSCAPE HAS JUST BEEN SHATTERED BY...
HELLHOUNDS OF THE DARK NEBULA!
(WHO ARE THEY? WHAT ARE THEY?)
(AND WHY ARE THEY WHIPPED ON BY RUSSIAN SOLDIERS?)
(THE DOG-DRIVERS ARE NOT RUSSIAN SOLDIERS, DARKSTAR! THEY'RE NOT EVEN HUMAN!)
DIRE WRAITHS!?! ROM, ARE WE FACING...
GUEST-STARRING: THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS! VANGUARD • DARKSTAR • MAJOR URSUS

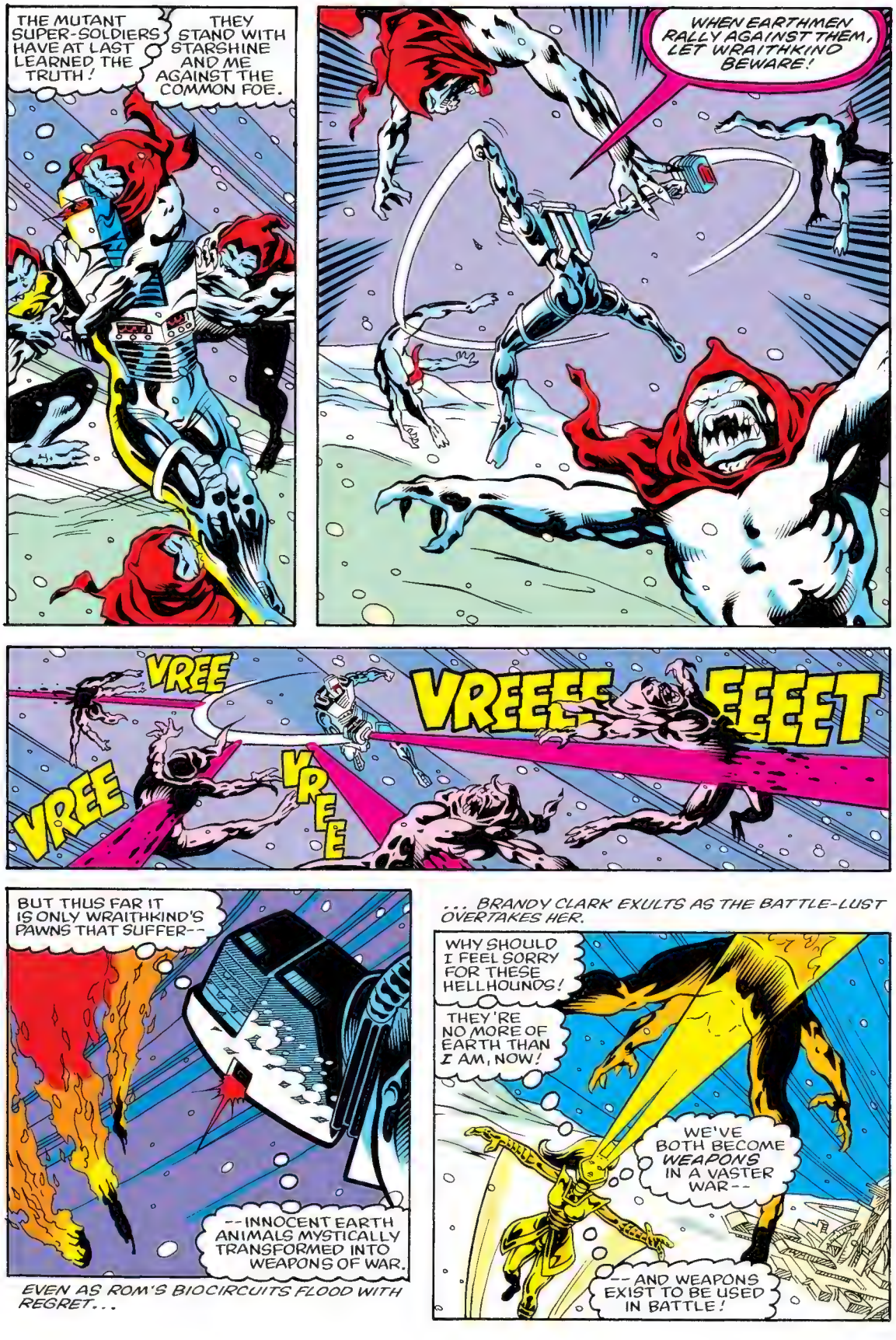
HELLHOUNDS OF THE DARK NEBULA! BORN ON EARTH, WRENCHED FROM THE SIBERIAN SNOWS...
...TO BE RE-BRED INTO FIERCE FIGHTERS!
ROM! THEIR BAYING MAKES ME...AFRAID!
IT IS MEANT TO DISRUPT SPACEKNIGHT NEUROCIRCUITRY, STARSHINE. THE SUBSEQUENT EXPERIENCE--
--IS CLOSELY AKIN TO WHAT HUMANS KNOW AS FEAR.
AND, HUMAN OR SPACEKNIGHT, THE BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH ONE'S FEAR--
--IS TO CONFRONT IT!
VREEEEEE
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER SINGS ITS SLAYING SONG AND THE FIRST HELLHOUND IS BLASTED FROM THE SKIES.


SOON TO BE FOLLOWED BY A SECOND...
ROM SAYS THESE... HORRORS... WERE ONCE WOLVES!
I LOVE ANIMALS, BUT AFTER WHAT THE WRAITHS DID TO THEM...
KIIIPPE
BRANDY CLARK WIELDS THE POWERS OF THE SLAIN SPACEKNIGHT STARSHINE--INTO WHOSE ARMOR SHE HAD HERSELF GRAFTED THAT SHE WOULD BE BETTER BE ABLE TO LOVE ME.
THE WOMAN I CARE FOR HAS BECOME A WARRIOR FIGHTING FOR HER WORLD!
THAT THOUGHT DISTURBS THE SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT...
...AND PREOCCUPIES HIM AT THE VERY MOMENT WHEN HIS MIND SHOULD BE ON THE BATTLE!
ARRGHH!
THE HELLHOUNDS BECOME INTANGIBLE--DISRUPTING MY CIRCUITRY BY PHASING THROUGH ME...
...EVEN AS OTHERS--REMAINING CORPOREAL--RAKE MY CYBORG STEEL WITH THEIR CLAWS!
THEIR SAVAGERY KNOWS NO BOUNDS! THEY MAY WIN THIS DAY BY STRENGTH OF NUMBERS!

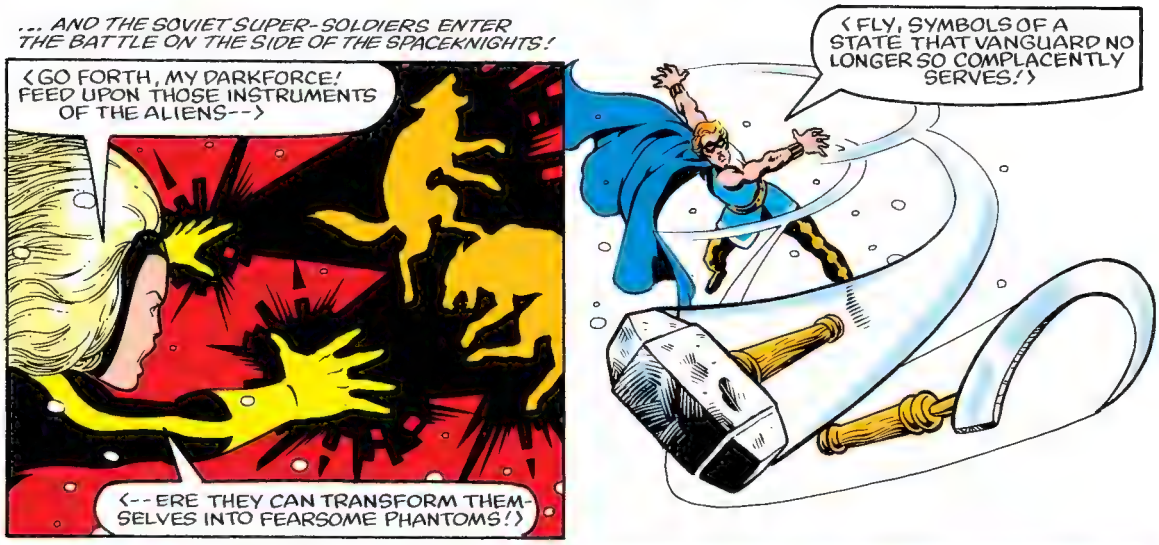
PERHAPS... UNLESS THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS INTERVENE TO EVEN THE ODDS!
〈DARKSTAR, I AM SORELY TROUBLED BY WHAT I SEE!〉
〈AS AM I, BROTHER VANGUARD! WE CAME TO KHYSTYM TO SAFE-GUARD A SECRET BASE FROM ENEMIES OF THE STATE--〉
〈-- BUT THOSE ENEMIES TELL US THAT THEY ARE NOT ENEMIES... AND THAT THE GARRISON OF THAT BASE IS NOT EVEN HUMAN!〉
〈THE SPACEKNIGHTS SPEAK THE TRUTH, COMRADES!〉*
*TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN, OF COURSE-- RALPH.
〈I HAVE BEEN TO THE SECRET BASE!〉
〈AND WHAT MAJOR URSUS SAW THERE--〉
〈-- WAS ENOUGH TO FREEZE THIS MAN-BEAR'S SOUL!〉
〈BUT I SEE YOU MUST BE CONVINCED ERE YOU WILL RAISE ARMS AGAINST THOSE YOU BELIEVE TO BE FELLOW RUSSIANS.〉
〈YOU MUST BE CONVINCED THAT THOSE WHO DRIVE THESE DEMON DOGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY APPEAR--!?
RRRRRRRGHH
THE SNARLS OF BEAST AND MAN-BEAST INTERMINGLE.

LEAVING A BLOOD-RED TRAIL IN HIS WAKE...
...MAJOR URSUS SURGES FORWARD THROUGH A CRIMSON, ANIMALISTIC HAZE.
THERE IS NO ESCAPING HIS FURY...
...AS TEN TONS OF MAN-BEAR SEEKS TO PROVE A POINT.
(LENIN'S BEARD--!)
(NICOLAI, LOOK--LOOK AT THE STEAMING CORPSE!)
(YES, DARKSTAR--THE CORPSE IS CHANGING, SHIFTING SHAPE IN DEATH, SHEDDING ITS ASSUMED HUMANITY--)
(--TO TAKE ON ITS TRUE, ALIEN FORM!)


〈BUT WHAT MANNER OF BEING, THEN...?〉
〈AND WHAT IS IT DOING ON RUSSIAN SOIL?〉
〈I HAVE ANOTHER MORE GRAVE QUESTION, VANGUARD.〉
〈WHY WERE WE SENT BY THE KGB TO PROTECT AN ALIEN!〉
THE CRUMBLING CORPSE OFFERS NO ANSWERS AS IT COLLAPSES INTO ASH...
...AND DEFILES THE PURITY OF THE SOVIET SNOWS.
〈WE HAVE BEEN LIED TO, COMRADES--TRICKED AGAIN INTO SERVING THE STATE'S OWN EVIL ENDS!〉
〈THAT IS, IF THE STATE ITSELF EVEN KNOWS, DARKSTAR! REMEMBER, THESE ALIENS ARE SHAPE-SHIFTERS!〉
〈YOU MEAN, THEY ARE CAPABLE OF IMITATING ANYONE--EVEN THE HEAD OF THE KGB?!〉
〈PERHAPS THIS TIME IT IS BOTH WE AND THE STATE WHO HAVE BEEN DECEIVED, MY SISTER!〉
〈IF THAT IS THE CASE, THEY WHO PERPETRATED THIS DECEPTION SHALL ANSWER TO THE MIGHT OF VANGUARD!〉
THE YOUNG RUSSIAN'S SICKLE SLASHES. THE TIDE OF BATTLE HAS TURNED.

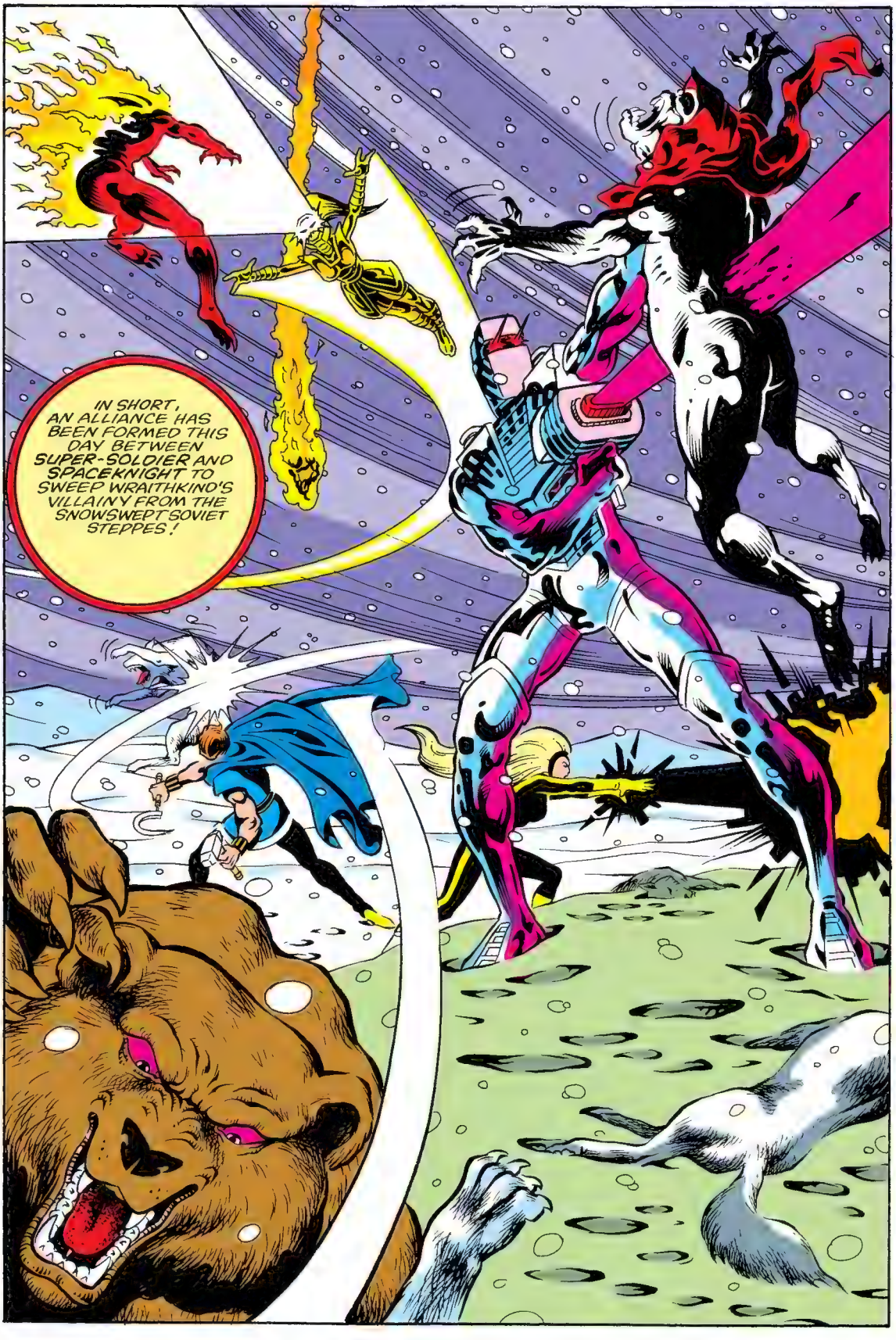

THE MUTANT SUPER-SOLDIERS HAVE AT LAST LEARNED THE TRUTH!
THEY STAND WITH STARSHINE AND ME AGAINST THE COMMON FOE.
WHEN EARTHMEN RALLY AGAINST THEM, LET WRAITHKIND BEWARE!
VREE
VREE
VREE
VREEEE

〈THE SPACEKNIGHTS FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT--OUR FIGHT--IN DEFENSE OF MOTHER RUSSIA!〉
〈BROADER THAN THAT, VANGUARD! THEY BATTLE TO PROTECT THE ENTIRE PLANET FROM THE ALIEN SCOURGE!〉
〈SHALL WE JOIN THEM, COMRADES--〉
〈--AND THUS PROVE OURSELVES TRULY GLOBAL PATRIOTS?!〉
THE ENEMY IDENTIFIED, THE CHOICE OF SIDES IS CLEAR...


...AND THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS ENTER THE BATTLE ON THE SIDE OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
〈GO FORTH, MY DARKFORCE! FEED UPON THOSE INSTRUMENTS OF THE ALIENS--〉
〈--ERE THEY CAN TRANSFORM THEMSELVES INTO FEARSOME PHANTOMS!〉
〈FLY, SYMBOLS OF A STATE THAT VANGUARD NO LONGER SO COMPLACENTLY SERVES!〉

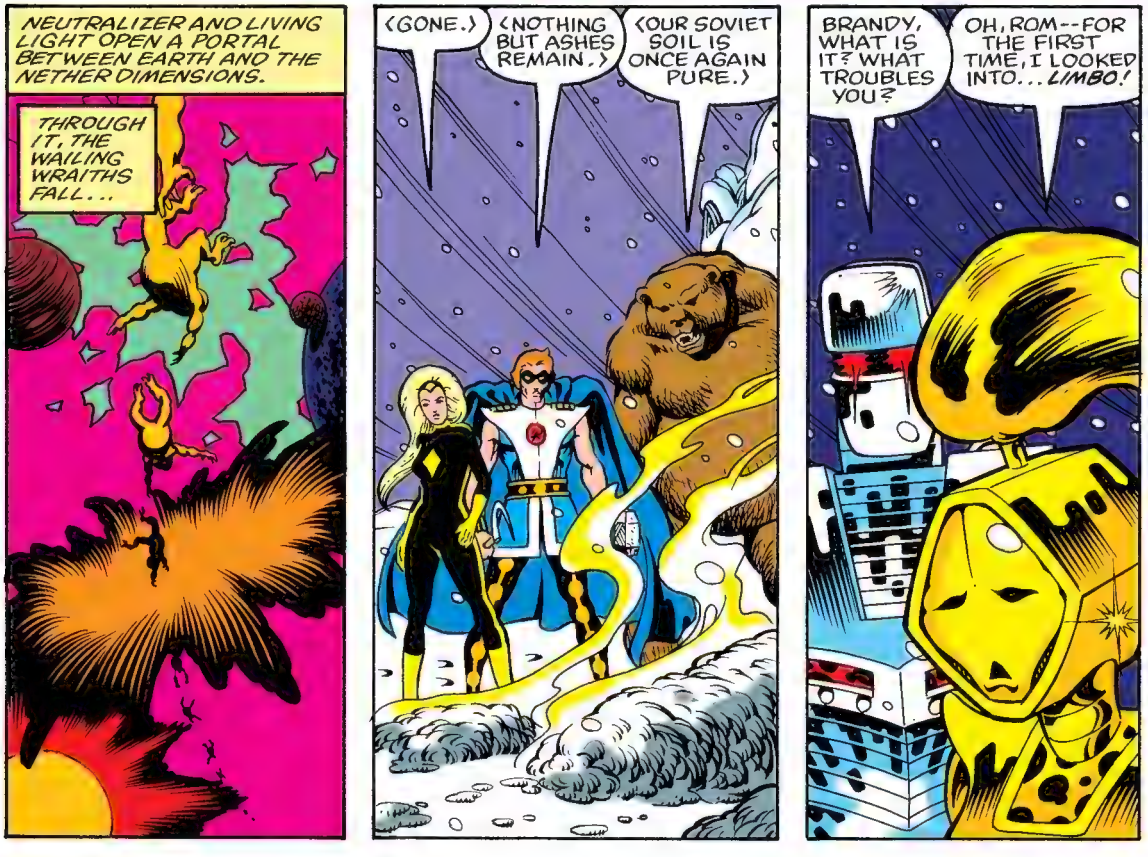
〈DRIVE THE ALIEN HORROR FROM OUR SACRED RUSSIAN SOIL!〉

NO ONE FIGHTS MORE FIERCELY THAN THE MAN-BEAR, MAJOR URSUS...
ROWRR
...THOUGH AT TIMES IT MAY APPEAR THAT HE BATTLES MORE FOR THE SPILLING OF HOT BLOOD THAN FOR PATRIOTIC PURPOSES.

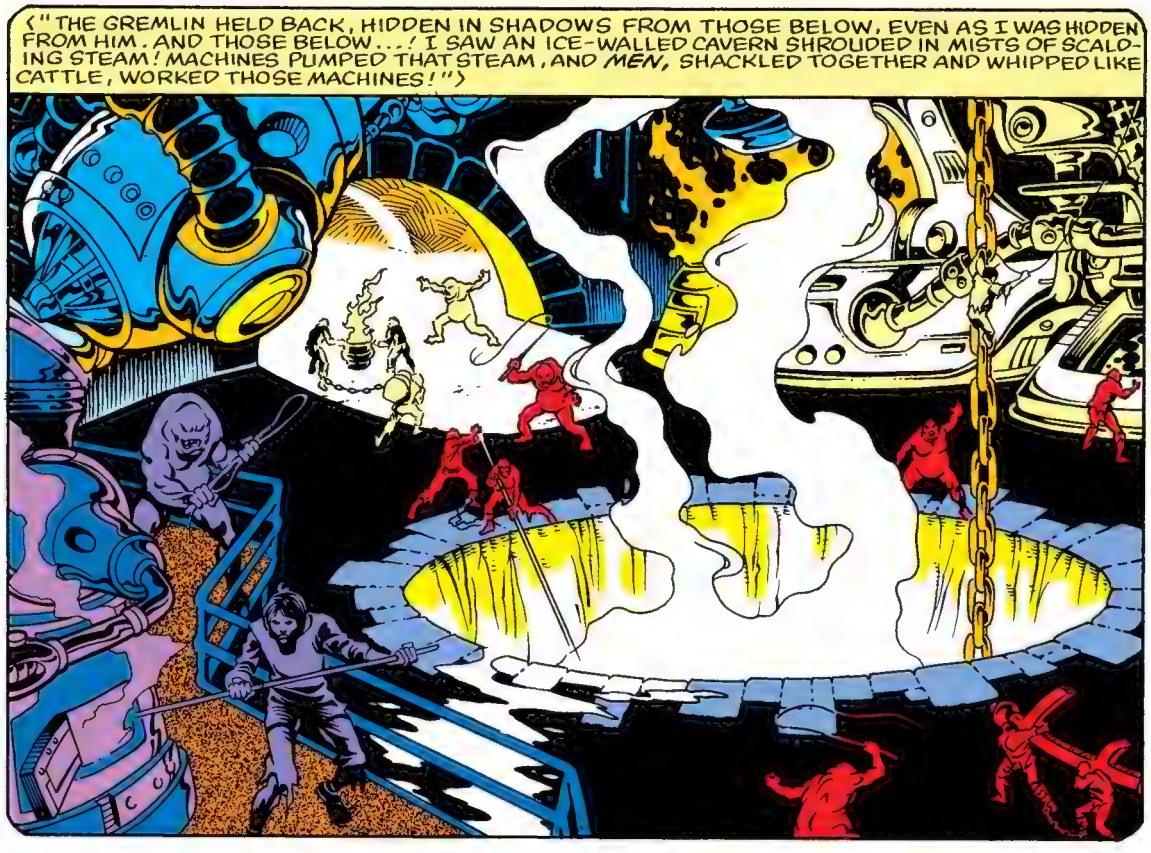

IN SHORT, AN ALLIANCE HAS BEEN FORMED THIS DAY BETWEEN SUPER-SOLDIER AND SPACEKNIGHT TO SWEEP WRAITHKIND'S VILLAINY FROM THE SNOWSWEPT SOVIET STEPPES!

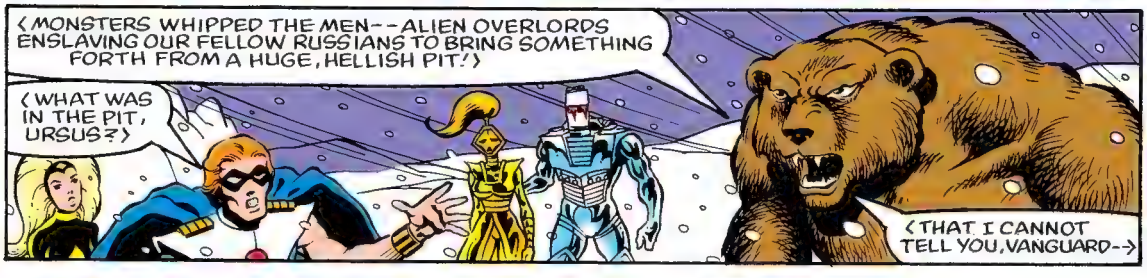
〈MORE WHITE WOLVES TO SLAY! MORE!〉
〈THE HELLHOUNDS HAVE BEEN BEATEN, URSUS! ALREADY THEIR CARCASSES FREEZE!〉
〈BUT THEIR MASTERS STILL REMAIN TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR!〉
BRANDY... TO ME! LET YOUR LIGHTEYES AND MY ENERGY ANALYZER MERELY CONFIRM THAT WHICH WE ALREADY KNOW!
THE PROCESS BEGINS.
THOSE WHO HAVE ASSUMED THE FORM OF SOVIET SOLDIERS TREMBLE.
AND THE TRUTH IS SOON REVEALED!
CURSE YOU, SPACEKNIGHTS!

NO, WRAITHS...
CURSE YOU!
YAGGH
GET OFF, MY WORLD, YOU SHAPE-SHIFTING HORRORS!
AGHH

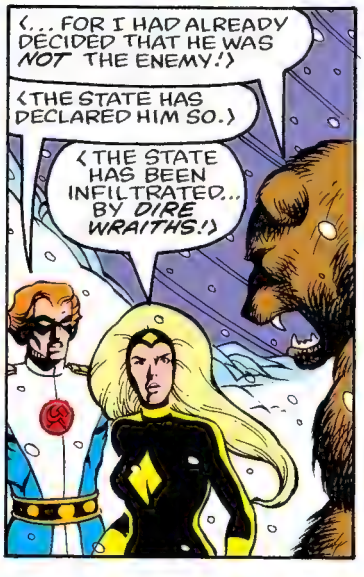

NEUTRALIZER AND LIVING LIGHT OPEN A PORTAL BETWEEN EARTH AND THE NETHER DIMENSIONS.
THROUGH IT, THE WAILING WRAITHS FALL...
〈GONE.〉
〈NOTHING BUT ASHES REMAIN.〉
〈OUR SOVIET SOIL IS ONCE AGAIN PURE.〉
BRANDY, WHAT IS IT? WHAT TROUBLES YOU?
OH, ROM--FOR THE FIRST TIME, I LOOKED INTO... LIMBO!

THERE ARE NO WORDS OF COMFORT I CAN SPEAK--NO PHRASES THAT WILL LESSEN THAT HORROR YOU HAVE WITNESSED.
BUT, MY LOVE, WE ARE ENGAGED IN A WAR FOR THE WELFARE OF YOUR WORLD.
BETTER THAT THE WRAITHS SHOULD BE BANISHED THENCE, THEN LET THEM MAKE OF EARTH A MAUSOLEUM.
〈THESE SPACE-KNIGHTS FIGHT FOR US, COMRADES--FOR EARTH.〉
〈THOUGH ONE IS OF ALIEN ORIGIN, AND THE OTHER, AN AMERICAN, THEIR FIGHT IS OURS.〉
〈YOU SPEAK FOR US ALL, MY BROTHER. WE SUPER-SOLDIERS MUST ENGAGE THE OTHER-WORLDLY ENEMY--〉
〈--AND DISCOVER WHAT EVIL IS BEING WROUGHT IN THAT SECRET CITADEL NESTLED DEEP IN OUR BELOVED RUSSIA.〉
〈IT MAY BE THAT I ALREADY KNOW, DARKSTAR, FOR I HAVE BEEN THERE AND RETURNED!〉
〈"WHILE YOU AND VANGUARD BATTLED THE SPACEKNIGHTS, I FOLLOWED THEIR ALLY--THE *GREMLIN*--TO THE WALLS OF THE SECRET BASE, PRODUCING A WEAPON, THE DEFORMED GENIUS CARVED AN ENTRANCE FOR HIMSELF.〉
〈"I WENT IN AFTER HIM, PROWLING CORRIDORS WITH A STEALTH I HAD TO MAINTAIN OR LOSE MY LIFE.〉
〈"STILL THINKING IT WAS THE GREMLIN WHO WAS OUR ENEMY, AND THAT THE BASE WAS SOME SINISTER DESIGN OF HIS OWN, I WAS NOT READY FOR THE SIGHT TO WHICH HE UNKNOWINGLY LED ME!"〉


〈"THE GREMLIN HELD BACK, HIDDEN IN SHADOWS FROM THOSE BELOW, EVEN AS I WAS HIDDEN FROM HIM. AND THOSE BELOW...! I SAW AN ICE-WALLED CAVERN SHROUDED IN MISTS OF SCALDING STEAM! MACHINES PUMPED THAT STEAM, AND *MEN*, SHACKLED TOGETHER AND WHIPPED LIKE CATTLE, WORKED THOSE MACHINES!"〉


〈MONSTERS WHIPPED THE MEN--ALIEN OVERLORDS ENSLAVING OUR FELLOW RUSSIANS TO BRING SOMETHING FORTH FROM A HUGE, HELLISH PIT!〉
〈WHAT WAS IN THE PIT, URSUS?〉
〈THAT I CANNOT TELL YOU, VANGUARD--〉

〈"--FOR I WAS SOON DISCOVERED AND DRIVEN FROM THE COMPLEX BY A PACK OF HELL-HOUNDS!〉
〈"I HELD THEM AT BAY ALLOWING THE GREMLIN TO PENETRATE THE BASE..."〉


〈...FOR I HAD ALREADY DECIDED THAT HE WAS *NOT* THE ENEMY!〉
〈THE STATE HAS DECLARED HIM SO.〉
〈THE STATE HAS BEEN INFILTRATED... BY *DIRE WRAITHS!*〉

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND RUSSIAN, BUT I DID HEAR YOU MENTION THE GREMLIN'S NAME! HE SAVED ROM'S LIFE...
ASKING ONLY IN RETURN THAT I AID HIM IN ERADICATING THOSE *TRUE* ENEMIES OF YOUR STATE.

THUS, I WILL KEEP FAITH WITH MY SAVIOR, I WILL CLEANSE HIS COUNTRY OF WRAITHKIND--
-- AND PERHAPS REPAY MY DEBT TO THE GREMLIN BY SAVING HIS LIFE IN THE BARGAIN!
<GO, SPACE-KNIGHT!>
<THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS ARE WITH YOU!>
THE ICE IS QUICKLY CROSSED, THE WALLS OF THE COMPLEX EASILY BREACHED. TOO EASILY...
<BY THE GREAT OCTOBER REVOLUTION--!>
<WE ARE TOO LATE!>
<TOO LATE TO SAVE THOSE WHO SLAVED HERE-->
<--PERHAPS TOO LATE TO SAVE MOTHER RUSSIA HERSELF!>

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TOO LATE TO SAVE ANYONE OR ANYTHING, HEROES--INCLUDING YOURSELVES!
RAISE THE SECURASPHERE--NOW!!
THE WRAITH WEAPON FLARES TO LIFE...
STARSHINE! WE MUST FLY FREE BEFORE...!
TOO LATE, SPACEKNIGHT! THE SECURASPHERE WILL HOLD YOU AS NO ORDINARY CELL MIGHT!
ROM, SURELY OUR COMBINED POWERS CAN FREE US FROM THIS FORCE FIELD!
ASSUREDLY, STARSHINE--WERE WE GIVE TIME TO USE THEM.
BUT THE SECURASPHERE IS MERELY MEANT TO RESTRAIN US LONG ENOUGH FOR...
〈LOOK! THE PIT!
〈FROM ITS STEAMING CENTER--〉
〈SOMETHING RISES!〉
SOMETHING RISES, INDEED.

SOMETHING THAT HAS NOT STALKED THE EARTH--
--FOR UNTOLD THOUSANDS OF YEARS!

AND, TRAPPED WITHIN THE DIRE WRAITH-DEVISED SECURA-SPHERE, THERE IS LITTLE THE HEROES CAN DO SAVE DEFEND THEM-SELVES AGAINST THE PREHISTORIC HORRORS!

WRAITH SCIENCE AND SORCERY HAS CREATED MANY MONSTERS--
--BUT NEVER ANY SO AWESOME AS THESE!
THAT'S BECAUSE THESE AREN'T WRAITH-CREATED, ROM! THESE ARE PREHISTORIC MAMMALS--CREATURES THAT ROAMED THE EARTH IN AGES PAST!
THE HORROR IS THAT THE WRAITHS HAVE SOMEHOW THAWED THEIR FROZEN REMAINS--REVIVED THEM--MADE THEM LIVE AGAIN... MORE SAVAGE THAN EVER!
<AS A BOY I USED TO PORE OVER BOOKS DEPICTING THE DAYS WHEN SUCH GIANTS STRODE THE EARTH.!>
<I NEVER THOUGHT THAT, AS A MAN, I WOULD BE FORCE TO FIGHT THEM!>
<IF THE DIRE WRAITHS ARE CAPABLE OF REVIVING THE LONG UNLIVING, HOW CAN EARTH EVER HOPE TO DEFEAT THEM?
<BY BATTLING FOR OUR WORLD WITH A RAGE THAT COSTS THE WRAITHS SO DEARLY, DARKSTAR--
<--THAT THEY WILL SOON COME TO REALIZE HOW UNPROFITABLE WOULD BE ANY ATTEMPT TO ENSLAVE US!>
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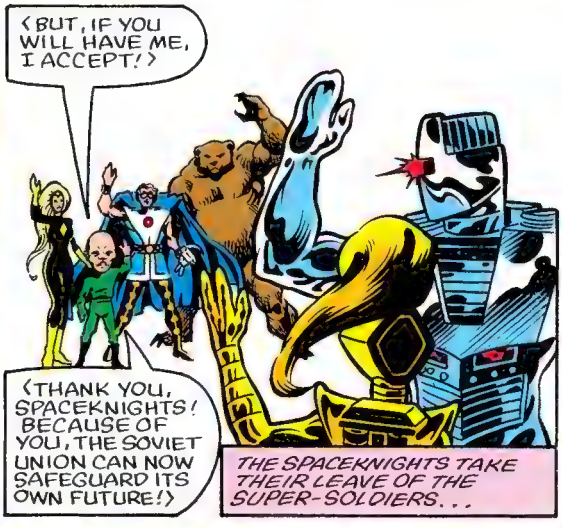
OUTSIDE THE SECURASPHERE, THE WRAITHS CACKLE OVER WHAT THEY IMAGINE TO BE THE PROGRESS OF THE BATTLE WITHIN...
OUR SCIENCE HAS CREATED THE SECURASPHERE! OUR MAGIC HAS REANIMATED MONSTERS FROM THE EARTH'S PAST!
TOGETHER, THE TWO WILL SUCCEED IN SLAYING THE SPACEKNIGHTS AND THEIR EARTH ALLIES!
THE SECURA-SPHERE STANDS. THE SPELLS AND INCANTATIONS CONTINUE.
MORE MONSTERS--LONG SLUMBERING, RISE FROM THE PERMAFROST PIT.

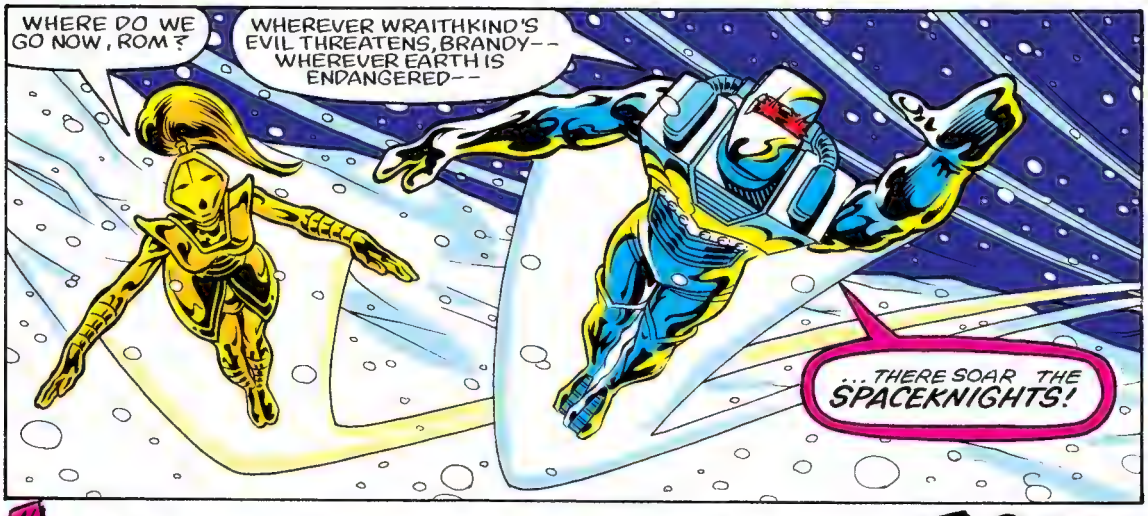
BUT, SUDDENLY...
ROM! WHAT DID YOU DO? THEY'RE DROPPING-- DYING!!
〈DECOMPOSING--AS IF THEIR INCREDIBLE AGE HAD FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH THEM!〉
〈I SAW THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT LEVEL HIS WEAPON AT THE CREATURES--!〉
〈BUT HE NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO FIRE HIS NEUTRALIZER. THEN WHO...?〉
SOMETHING IS WRONG! I SENSE THAT OUR PLAN IS FAILING!
THE SECURA-SPHERE--IT IS FALTERING... FAILING!! HOW--?!
I SHUT YOUR DAMNABLE DEVICE DOWN, WRAITHS, UTILIZING THE SCIENCE I DISCOVERED HERE IN YOUR HIDDEN COMPLEX--SCIENCE WHICH MY MUTANT MIND EASILY MASTERED!
A HUMAN-- BUT UNLIKE ANY HUMAN I HAVE EVER SEEN BEFORE!
BUT A HUMAN STILL--AND THUS SUBJECT TO WRAITH SORCERY!
BUT, BEFORE THE WRAITH WITCHES CAN HURL THEIR EVIL INCANTATIONS...

. . . THOSE THE GREMLIN FREED FROM THE WRAITH SECURASPHERE STRIKE!
YIIEEE
YAARGH
LIMBO CLAIMS SOME OF WRAITH-KIND PRESENT.
DEATH CLAIMS THE REST.
KHYSTYM IS CLEANSED OF DIRE WRAITHS.

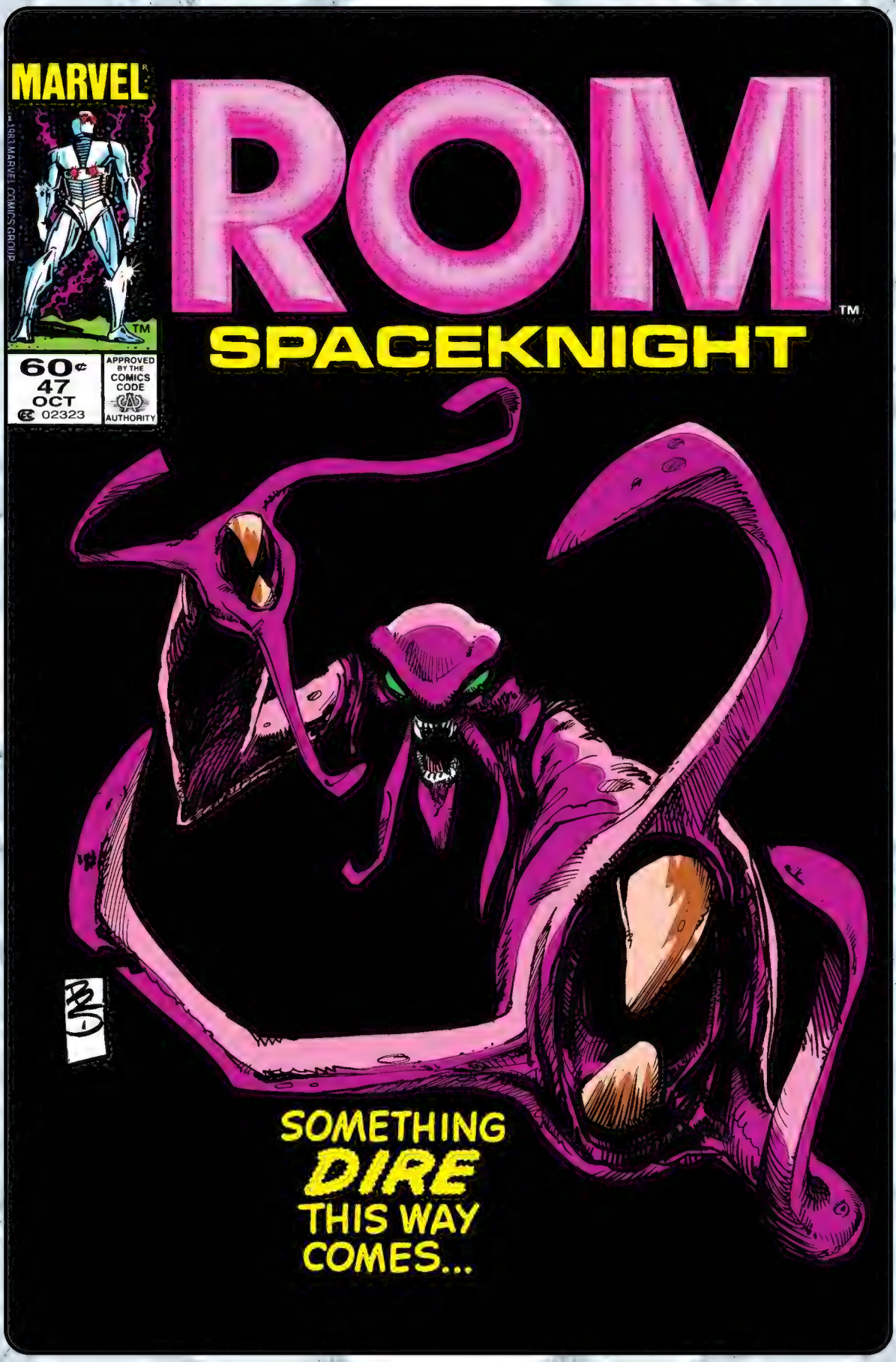
〈BUT WHAT OF THIS COMPLEX--ITS MACHINERY--AND THE ADVANCED, EVIL SCIENCE IT REPRESENTS?〉
〈WE MUST DESTROY IT, VANGUARD, LEST THE WRAITHS RETURN TO USE IT AGAIN!〉
〈I HAVE A BETTER IDEA! WHY DON'T YOU, SUPER-SOLDIERS USE THIS COMPLEX AS A BASE?〉
〈HMMM...OUR PRESENCE HERE WOULD CERTAINLY ENSURE THAT NEITHER WRAITHKIND NOR THE STATE TURNED THIS PLACE TO EVIL.〉

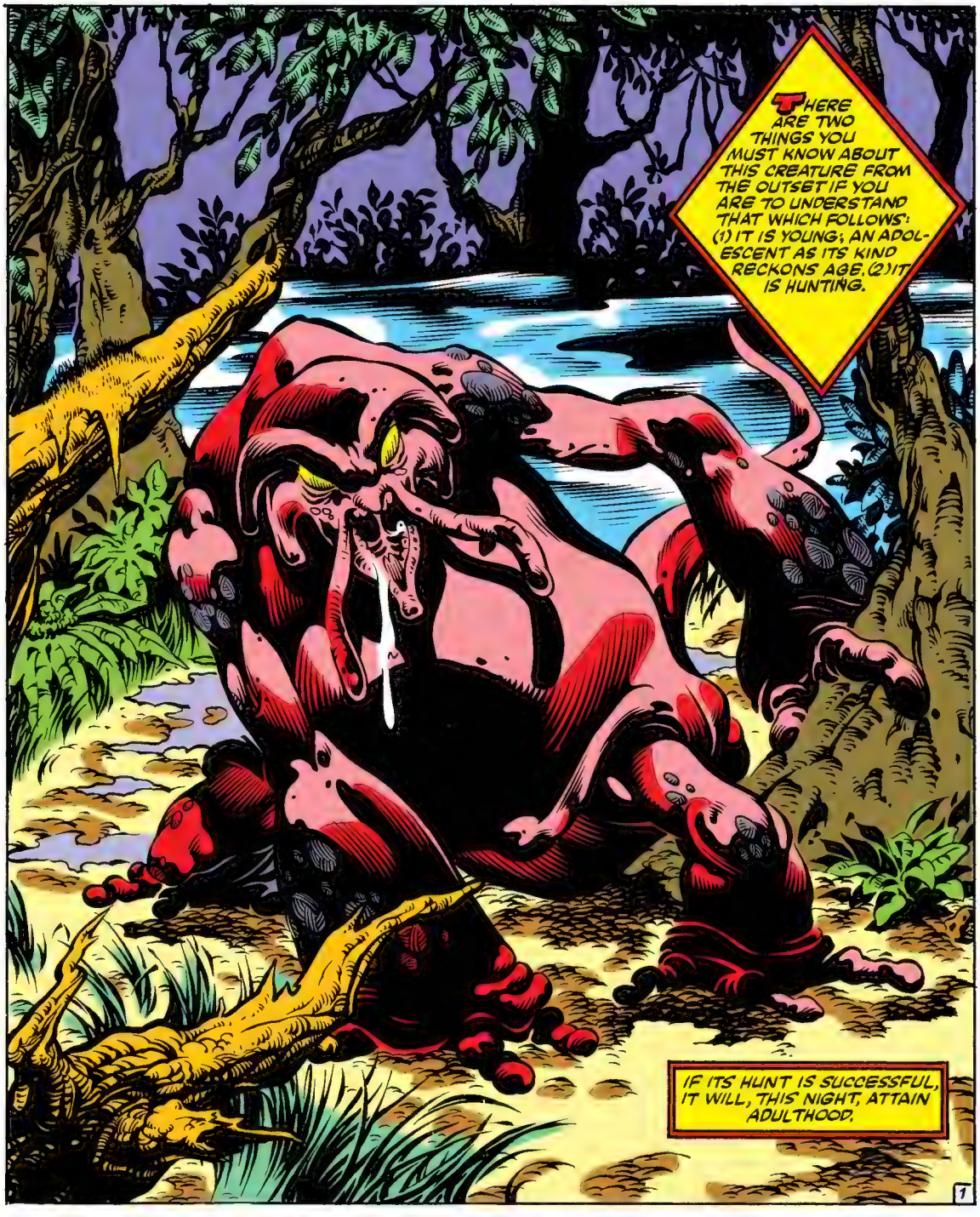
〈WE SHALL DO IT, GREMLIN! HERE WE CAN FIGHT FOR MOTHER RUSSIA FREE FROM INTERVENTION BY THE STATE.〉
〈IT SHALL BE THE HOME WE SOVIET MUTANTS NEVER POSSESSED.〉
〈THE GREMLIN IS A MUTANT, TOO.〉
〈THEN JOIN US, GREMLIN. ADD YOUR INTELLECT--TO THE MIGHT OF THE SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIERS!
〈I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CONSIDERED A FREAK, FORCED BY MY DEFORMITY TO WORK, ALONE...〉

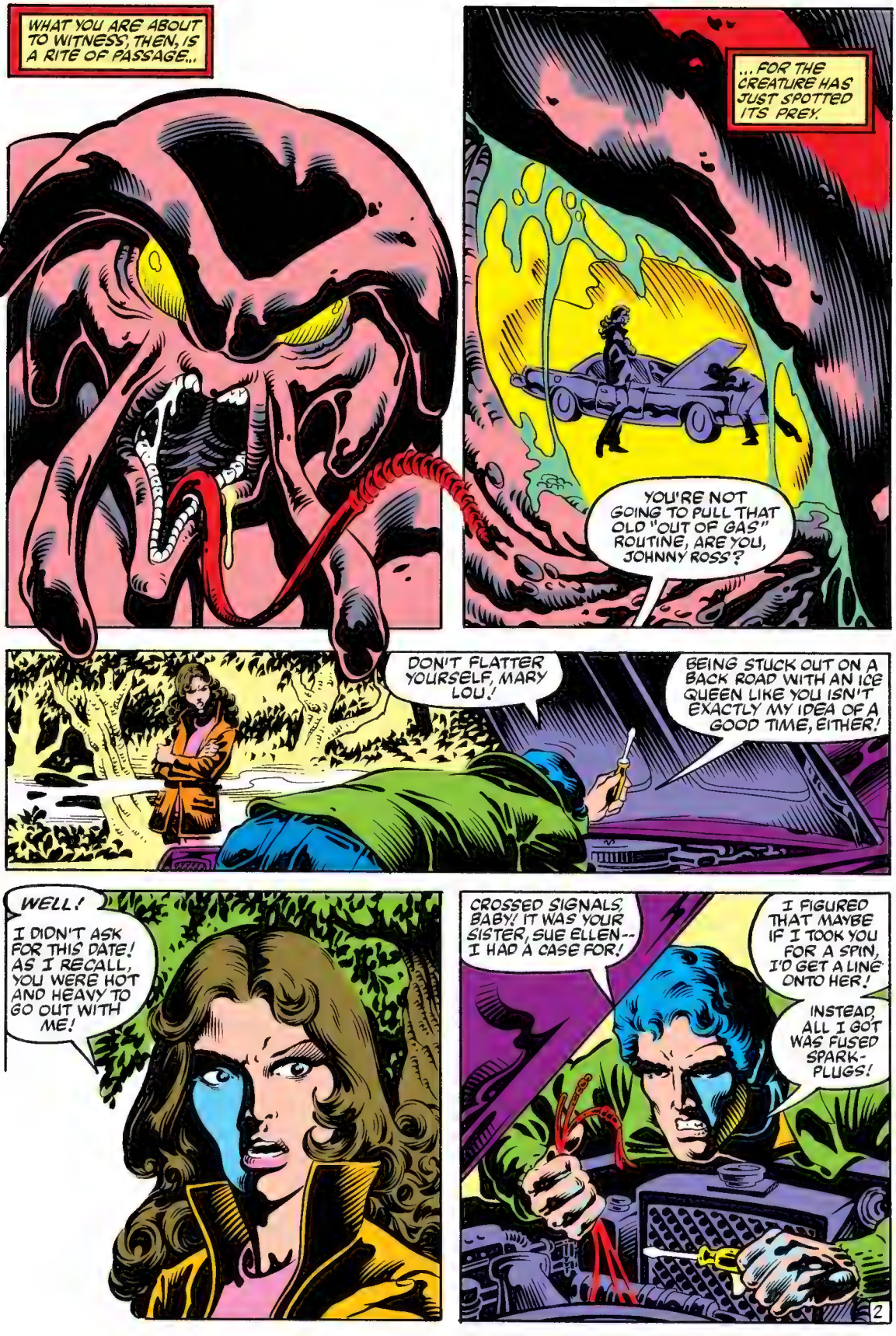

〈BUT, IF YOU WILL HAVE ME, I ACCEPT!〉
〈THANK YOU, SPACEKNIGHTS! BECAUSE OF YOU, THE SOVIET UNION CAN NOW SAFEGUARD ITS OWN FUTURE!〉
THE SPACEKNIGHTS TAKE THEIR LEAVE OF THE SUPER-SOLDIERS...

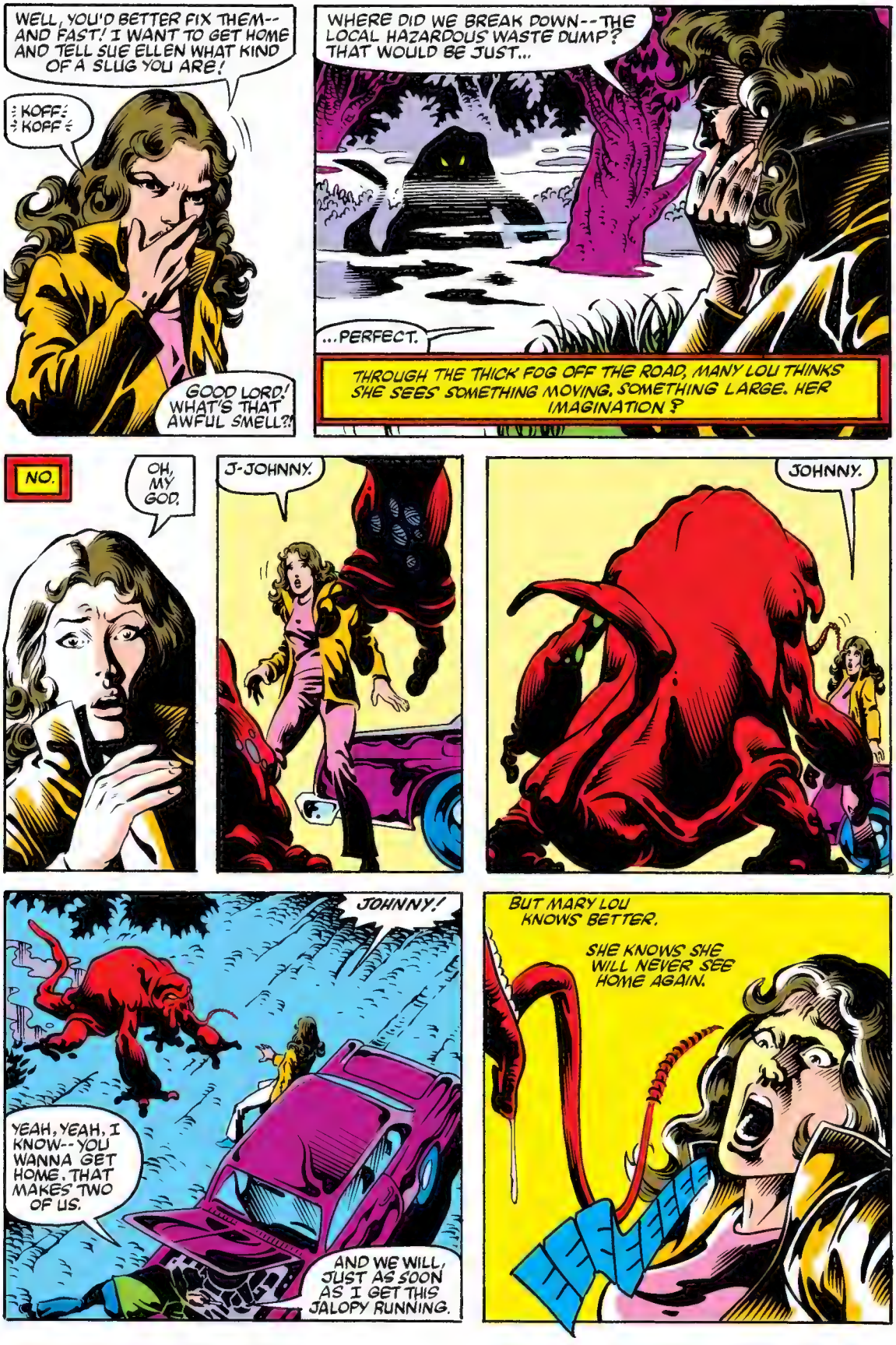

WHERE DO WE GO NOW, ROM?
WHEREVER WRAITHKIND'S EVIL THREATENS, BRANDY--WHEREVER EARTH IS ENDANGERED--
...THERE SOAR THE SPACEKNIGHTS!

NEXT ONE MAN'S TOYS--ARE ANOTHER MAN'S TERROR!

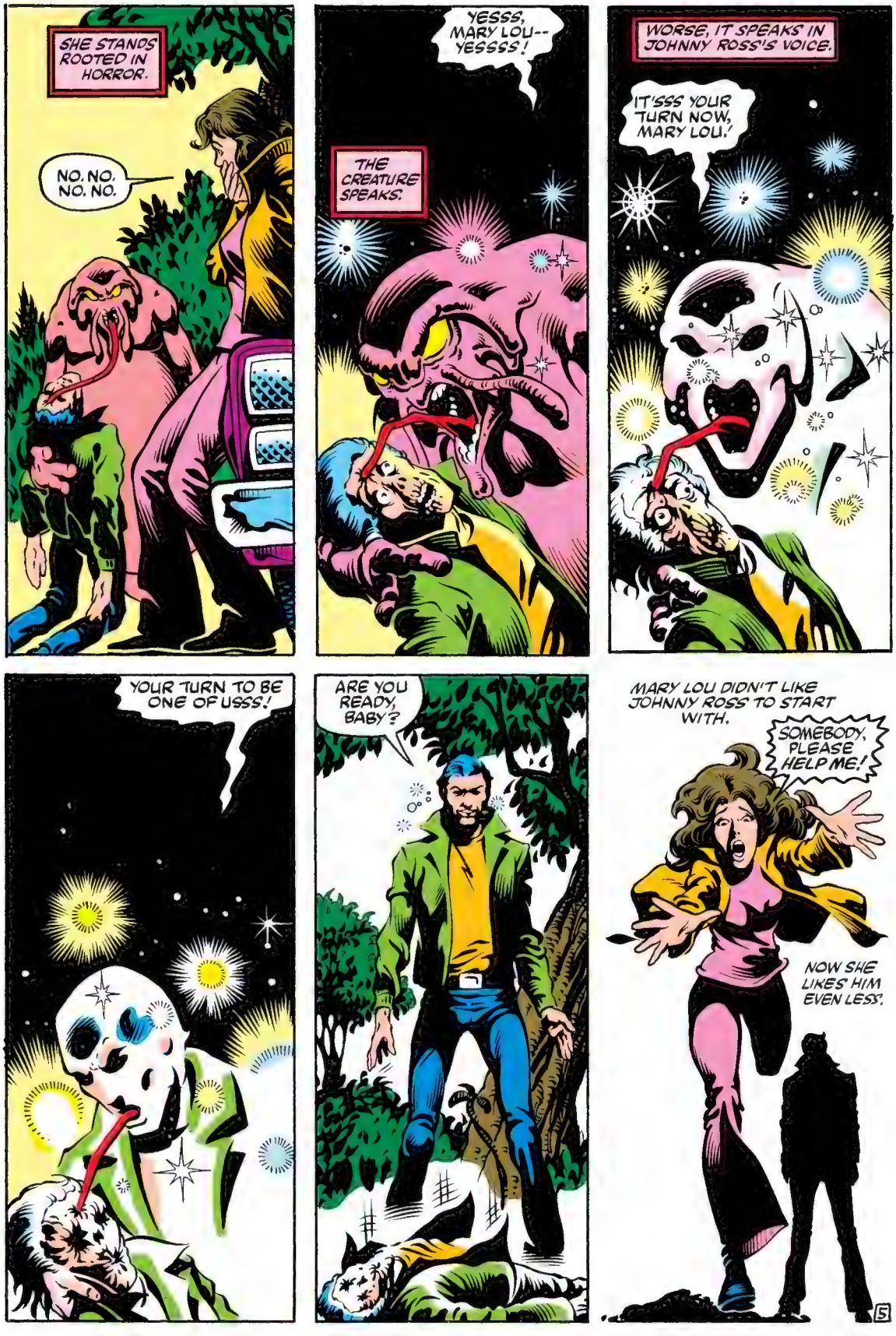

MARVEL
ROM
SPACEKNIGHT
60¢
47
OCT
02323
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
SOMETHING
DIRE
THIS WAY
COMES...


THERE ARE TWO THINGS YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT THIS CREATURE FROM THE OUTSET IF YOU ARE TO UNDERSTAND THAT WHICH FOLLOWS: (1) IT IS YOUNG; AN ADOLESCENT AS ITS KIND RECKONS AGE. (2) IT IS HUNTING.
IF ITS HUNT IS SUCCESSFUL, IT WILL, THIS NIGHT, ATTAIN ADULTHOOD.
1


WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO WITNESS, THEN, IS A RITE OF PASSAGE...
...FOR THE CREATURE HAS JUST SPOTTED ITS PREY.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO PULL THAT OLD "OUT OF GAS" ROUTINE, ARE YOU, JOHNNY ROSS?
DON'T FLATTER YOURSELF, MARY LOU!
BEING STUCK OUT ON A BACK ROAD WITH AN ICE QUEEN LIKE YOU ISN'T EXACTLY MY IDEA OF A GOOD TIME, EITHER!
WELL!
I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS DATE! AS I RECALL, YOU WERE HOT AND HEAVY TO GO OUT WITH ME!
CROSSED SIGNALS, BABY! IT WAS YOUR SISTER, SUE ELLEN-- I HAD A CASE FOR!
I FIGURED THAT MAYBE IF I TOOK YOU FOR A SPIN, I'D GET A LINE ONTO HER!
INSTEAD, ALL I GOT WAS FUSED SPARK-PLUGS!
2

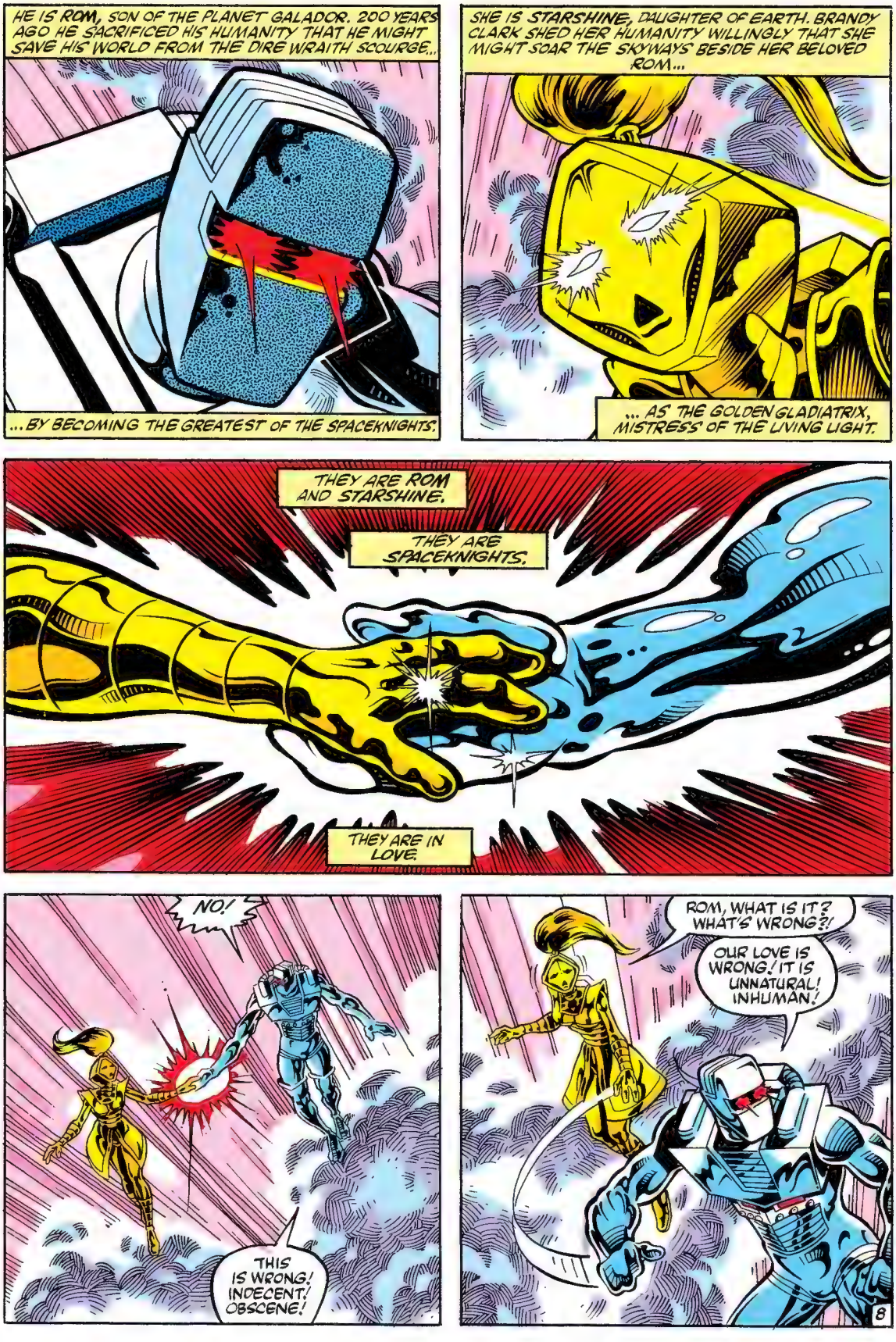

WELL, YOU'D BETTER FIX THEM-- AND FAST! I WANT TO GET HOME AND TELL SUE ELLEN WHAT KIND OF A SLUG YOU ARE!
:KOFF: :KOFF:
GOOD LORD! WHAT'S THAT AWFUL SMELL?!
WHERE DID WE BREAK DOWN--THE LOCAL HAZARDOUS WASTE DUMP? THAT WOULD BE JUST...
...PERFECT.
THROUGH THE THICK FOG OFF THE ROAD, MANY LOU THINKS SHE SEES SOMETHING MOVING. SOMETHING LARGE. HER IMAGINATION?
NO.
OH, MY GOD.
J-JOHNNY.
JOHNNY.
JOHNNY!
YEAH, YEAH, I KNOW-- YOU WANNA GET HOME. THAT MAKES TWO OF US.
AND WE WILL, JUST AS SOON AS I GET THIS JALOPY RUNNING.
BUT MARY LOU KNOWS BETTER.
SHE KNOWS SHE WILL NEVER SEE HOME AGAIN.
EEEEEEEE

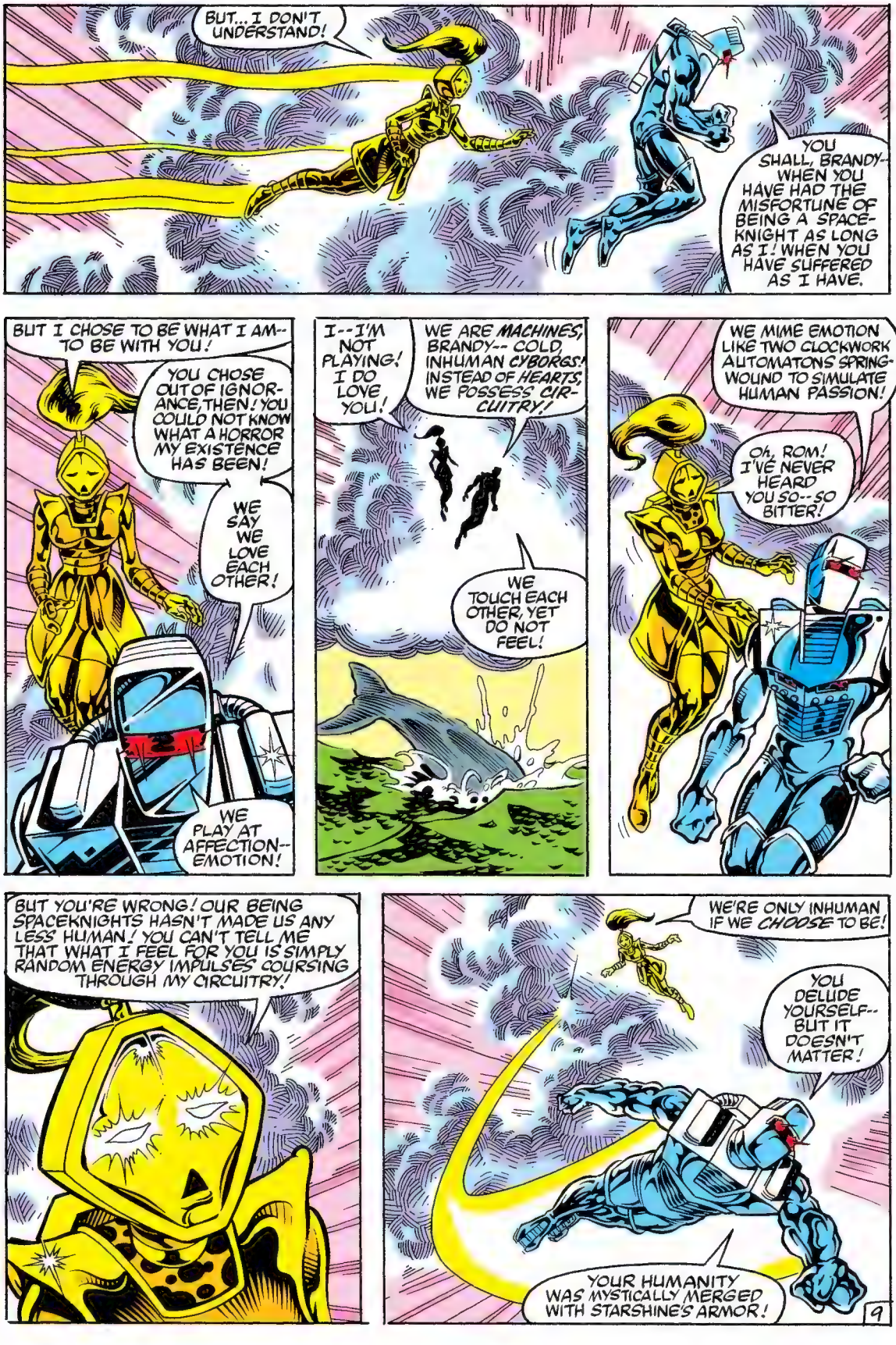
WHAT IN--?! OH! OH, LORD! RUN, MARY LOU! RUN!
GET IN THE CAR, MARY LOU! I'LL--!
GLLRKKK!
JOHNNY ROSS WAS CLAIRTON HIGH'S RESIDENT FOOTBALL HERO--THE PRIDE OF COACH BROCK JONES!
SINCE GRADUATION, HE'D HAD OFFERS FROM MORE THAN ONE PRO CLUB. HE WAS THE KIND OF YOUNG PLAYER THEY LIKED...TOUGH, AGGRESSIVE, HARD-HITTING.
BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, NOT TOUGH ENOUGH OFF THE FOOTBALL FIELD TO DEAL WITH A NIGHTMARE LIKE THIS.
SCHK!
YEEALLGHH!
THE CREATURE'S TONGUE DRILLS A TINY HOLE IN JOHNNY'S SKULL.
THEN IT FEEDS UPON HIS BRAIN.
MARY LOU GETS VIOLENTLY ILL.
4

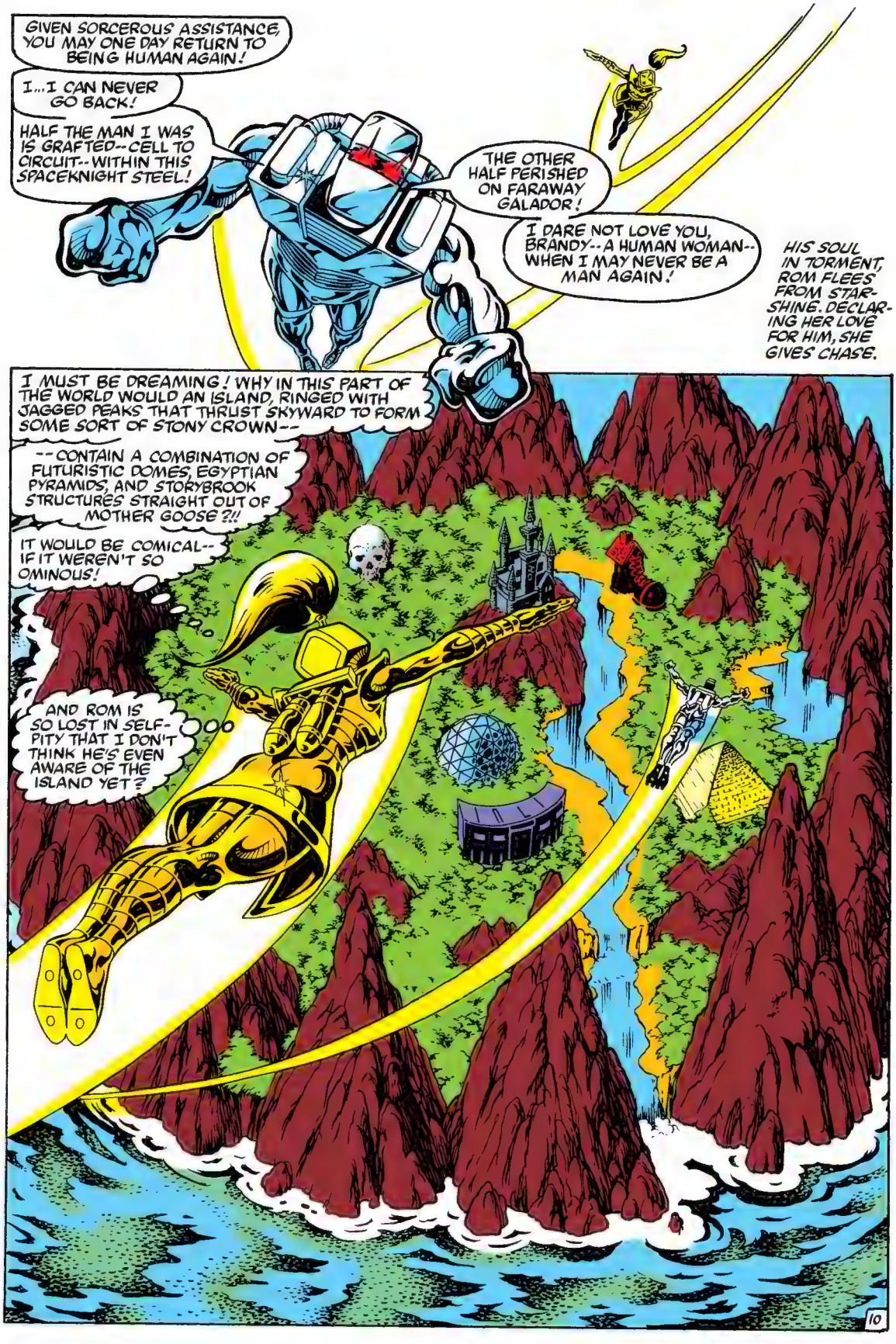

SHE STANDS ROOTED IN HORROR.
NO, NO, NO, NO.
YESSS, MARY LOU-- YESSSS!
THE CREATURE SPEAKS.
WORSE, IT SPEAKS IN JOHNNY ROSS'S VOICE.
IT'SSS YOUR TURN NOW, MARY LOU.'
YOUR TURN TO BE ONE OF USSS!
ARE YOU READY, BABY?
MARY LOU DIDN'T LIKE JOHNNY ROSS TO START WITH.
SOMEBODY, PLEASE HELP ME!
NOW SHE LIKES HIM EVEN LESS.
5

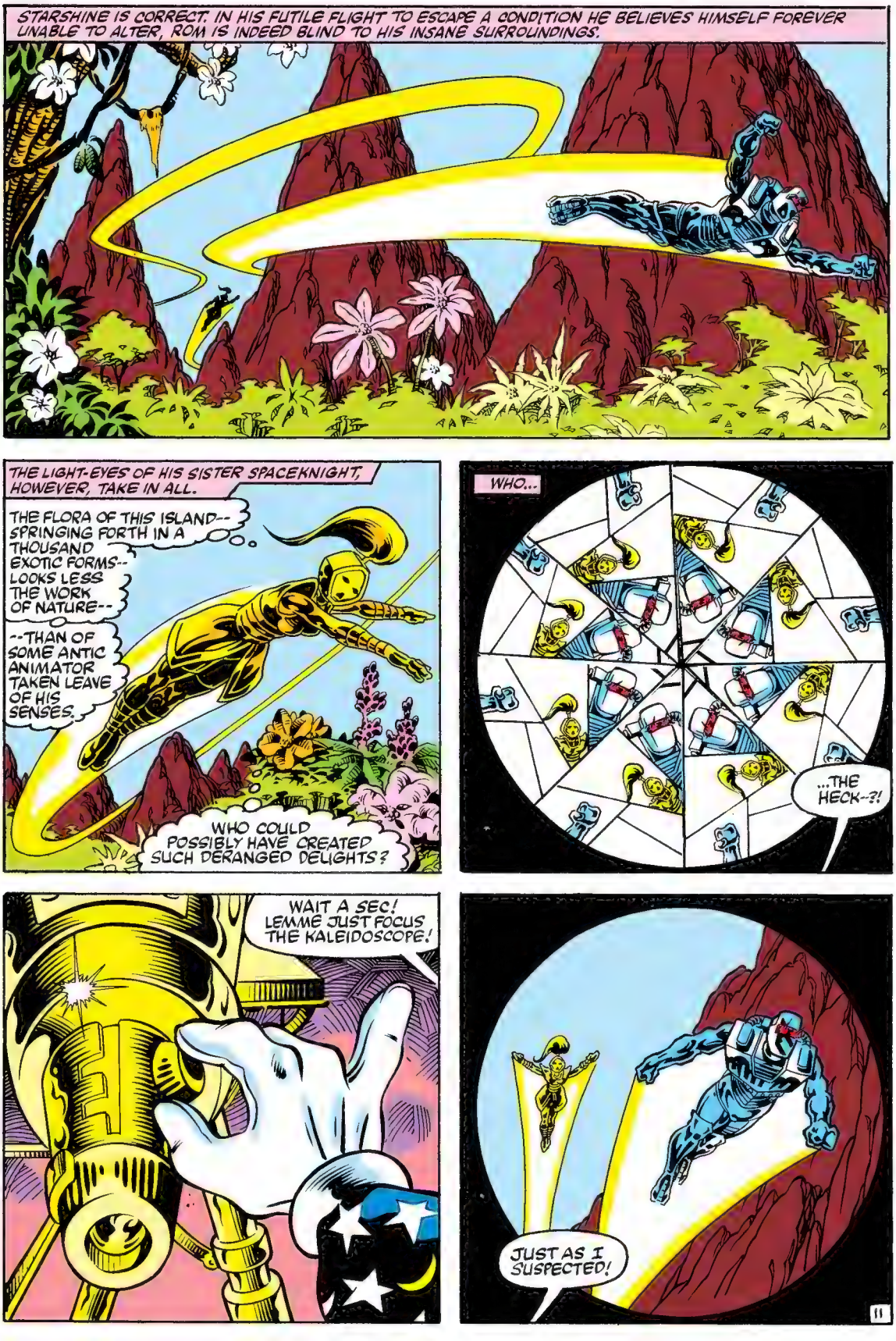
SHE RUNS, BLINDED BY FEAR.
A SECOND CREATURE WAITS.
HELLO, MARY LOU!
OH, GOD! NO! PLEASE DON'T TAKE ME! PLEASE!
BUT WE MUST! DON'T YOU SEE-- WE CAN'T LEAVE JOHNNY LONELY!
NOOOooo!
THE BARBED TONGUE CARESSES HER FACE, TASTES HER TEARS...
...THEN DRIVES DOWN. SHE FEELS PAIN FOR ONLY AN INSTANT, BEFORE HER MEMORIES ARE ASSIMILATED... HER LIFE DEVOURED.
THE HUNT IS OVER, THE RITUAL DONE.
ASSUMING THEIR FIRST HUMAN FORMS, TWO DIRE WRAITHS HAVE REACHED MATURITY.
6

SOMEWHERE OVER THE EAST CHINA SEA, TWO SPACEKNIGHTS SOAR.
ONE MAN'S TOYS... ARE ANOTHER MAN'S TERROR!
BILL MANTLO STORY * SAL BUSCEMA and AKIN & GARVEY ART * RICK PARKER LETTERS * BEN SEAN COLORS * RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR * JIM SHOOTER CHIEF * WALT SIMONSON DIRE WRAITH DESIGNER

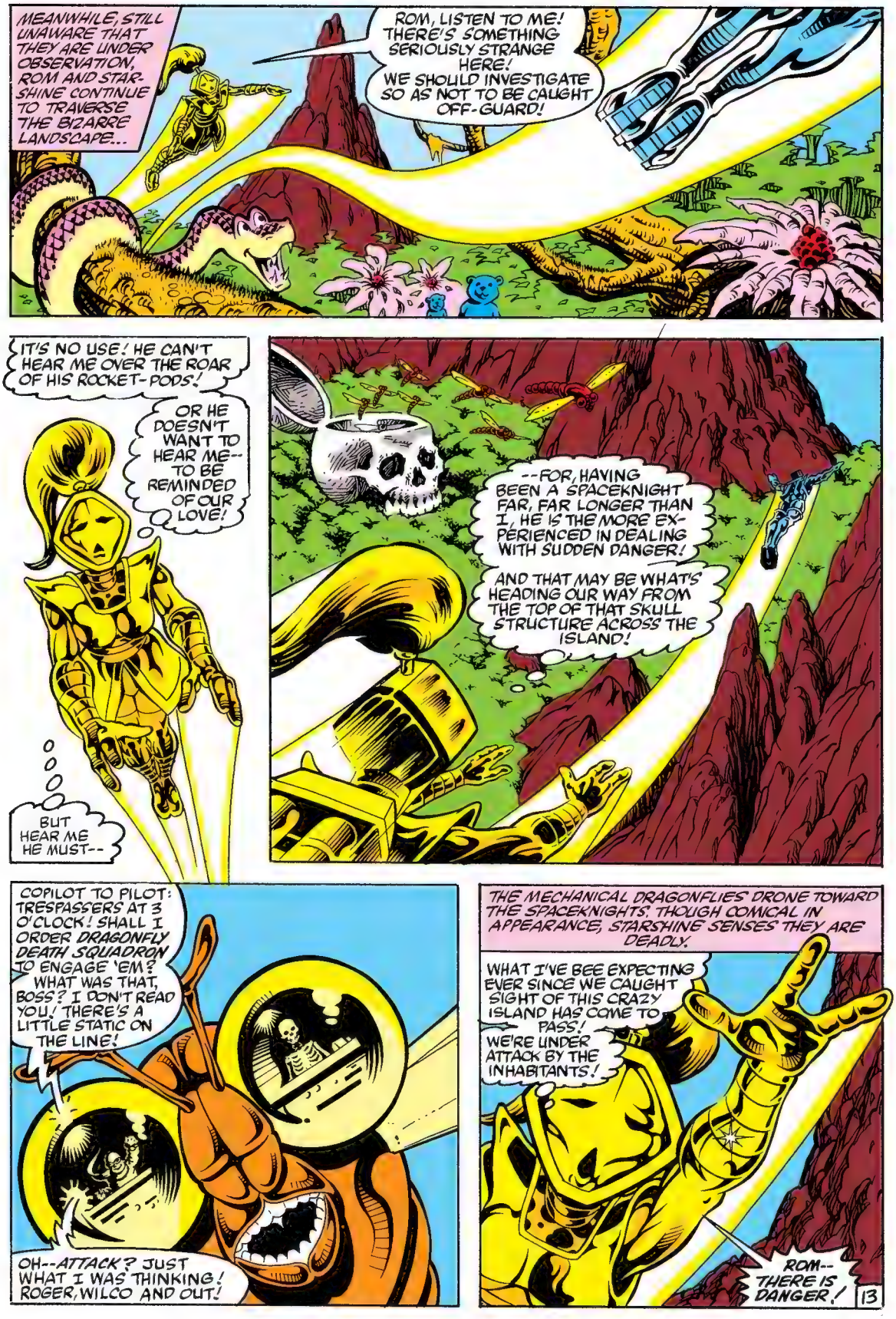

HE IS ROM, SON OF THE PLANET GALADOR. 200 YEARS AGO HE SACRIFICED HIS HUMANITY THAT HE MIGHT SAVE HIS WORLD FROM THE DIRE WRAITH SCOURGE...
...BY BECOMING THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS.
SHE IS STARSHINE, DAUGHTER OF EARTH. BRANDY CLARK SHED HER HUMANITY WILLINGLY THAT SHE MIGHT SOAR THE SKYWAYS BESIDE HER BELOVED ROM...
... AS THE GOLDEN GLADIATRIX, MISTRESS OF THE LIVING LIGHT.
THEY ARE ROM AND STARSHINE.
THEY ARE SPACEKNIGHTS.
THEY ARE IN LOVE.
NO!
THIS IS WRONG! INDECENT! OBSCENE!
ROM, WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?!
OUR LOVE IS WRONG! IT IS UNNATURAL! INHUMAN!
8


BUT... I DON'T UNDERSTAND!
YOU SHALL, BRANDY-- WHEN YOU HAVE HAD THE MISFORTUNE OF BEING A SPACE-KNIGHT AS LONG AS I! WHEN YOU HAVE SUFFERED AS I HAVE.
BUT I CHOSE TO BE WHAT I AM-- TO BE WITH YOU!
YOU CHOSE OUT OF IGNOR-ANCE, THEN! YOU COULD NOT KNOW WHAT A HORROR MY EXISTENCE HAS BEEN!
WE SAY WE LOVE EACH OTHER!
WE PLAY AT AFFECTION-- EMOTION!
I--I'M NOT PLAYING! I DO LOVE YOU!
WE ARE MACHINES, BRANDY-- COLD, INHUMAN CYBORGS! INSTEAD OF HEARTS, WE POSSESS CIR-CUITRY!
WE TOUCH EACH OTHER, YET DO NOT FEEL!
WE MIME EMOTION LIKE TWO CLOCKWORK AUTOMATONS SPRING-WOUND TO SIMULATE HUMAN PASSION!
OH, ROM! I'VE NEVER HEARD YOU SO--SO BITTER!
BUT YOU'RE WRONG! OUR BEING SPACEKNIGHTS HASN'T MADE US ANY LESS HUMAN! YOU CAN'T TELL ME THAT WHAT I FEEL FOR YOU IS SIMPLY RANDOM ENERGY IMPULSES COURSING THROUGH MY CIRCUITRY!
WE'RE ONLY INHUMAN IF WE CHOOSE TO BE!
YOU DELUDE YOURSELF-- BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER!
YOUR HUMANITY WAS MYSTICALLY MERGED WITH STARSHINE'S ARMOR!
9

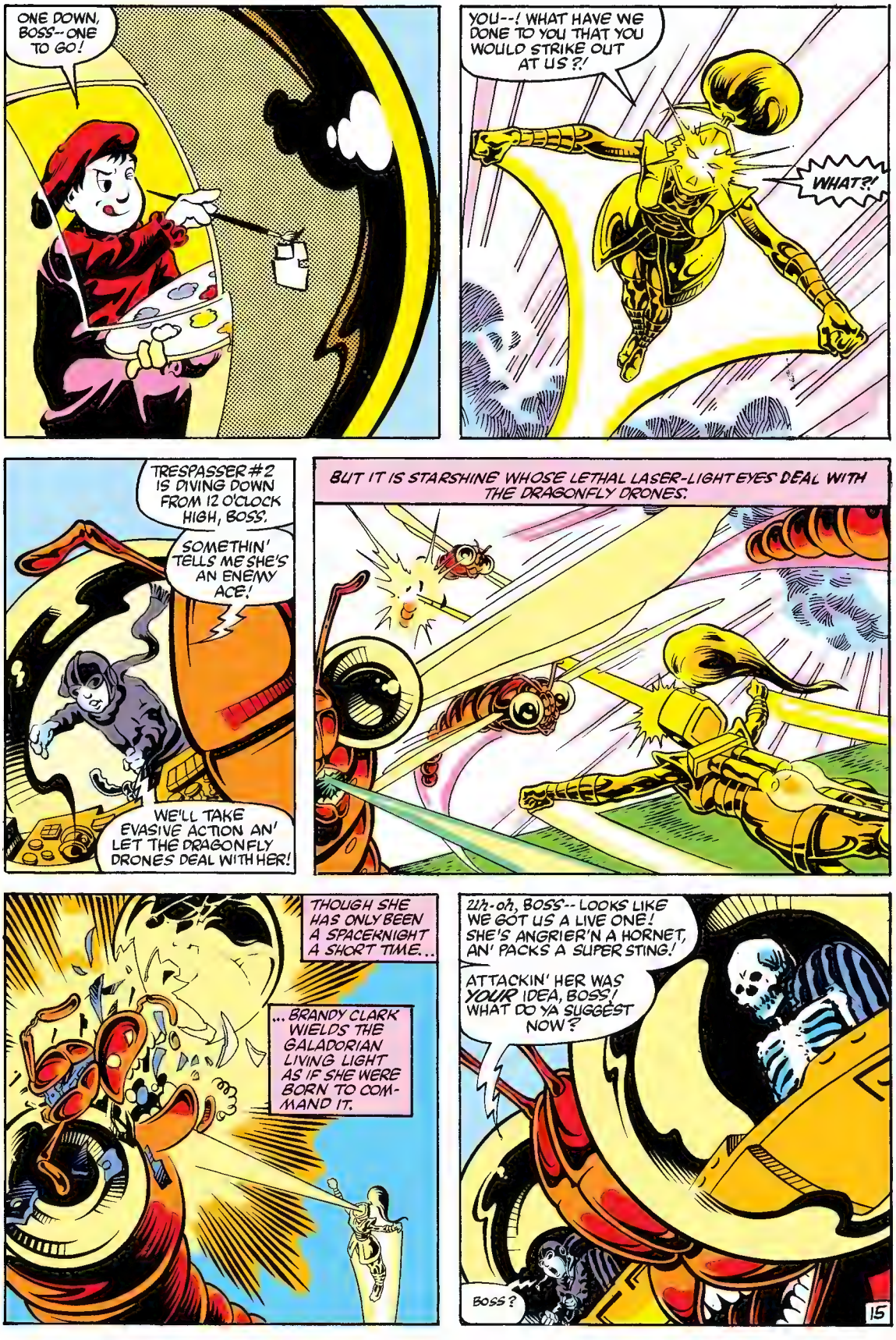

GIVEN SORCEROUS ASSISTANCE, YOU MAY ONE DAY RETURN TO BEING HUMAN AGAIN!
I...I CAN NEVER GO BACK!
HALF THE MAN I WAS IS GRAFTED--CELL TO CIRCUIT--WITHIN THIS SPACEKNIGHT STEEL!
THE OTHER HALF PERISHED ON FARAWAY GALADOR!
I DARE NOT LOVE YOU, BRANDY--A HUMAN WOMAN--WHEN I MAY NEVER BE A MAN AGAIN!
HIS SOUL IN TORMENT, ROM FLEES FROM STARSHINE. DECLARING HER LOVE FOR HIM, SHE GIVES CHASE.
I MUST BE DREAMING! WHY IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD WOULD AN ISLAND, RINGED WITH JAGGED PEAKS THAT THRUST SKYWARD TO FORM SOME SORT OF STONY CROWN--
--CONTAIN A COMBINATION OF FUTURISTIC DOMES, EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS, AND STORYBROOK STRUCTURES STRAIGHT OUT OF MOTHER GOOSE?!!
IT WOULD BE COMICAL--IF IT WEREN'T SO OMINOUS!
AND ROM IS SO LOST IN SELF-PITY THAT I DON'T THINK HE'S EVEN AWARE OF THE ISLAND YET?
10

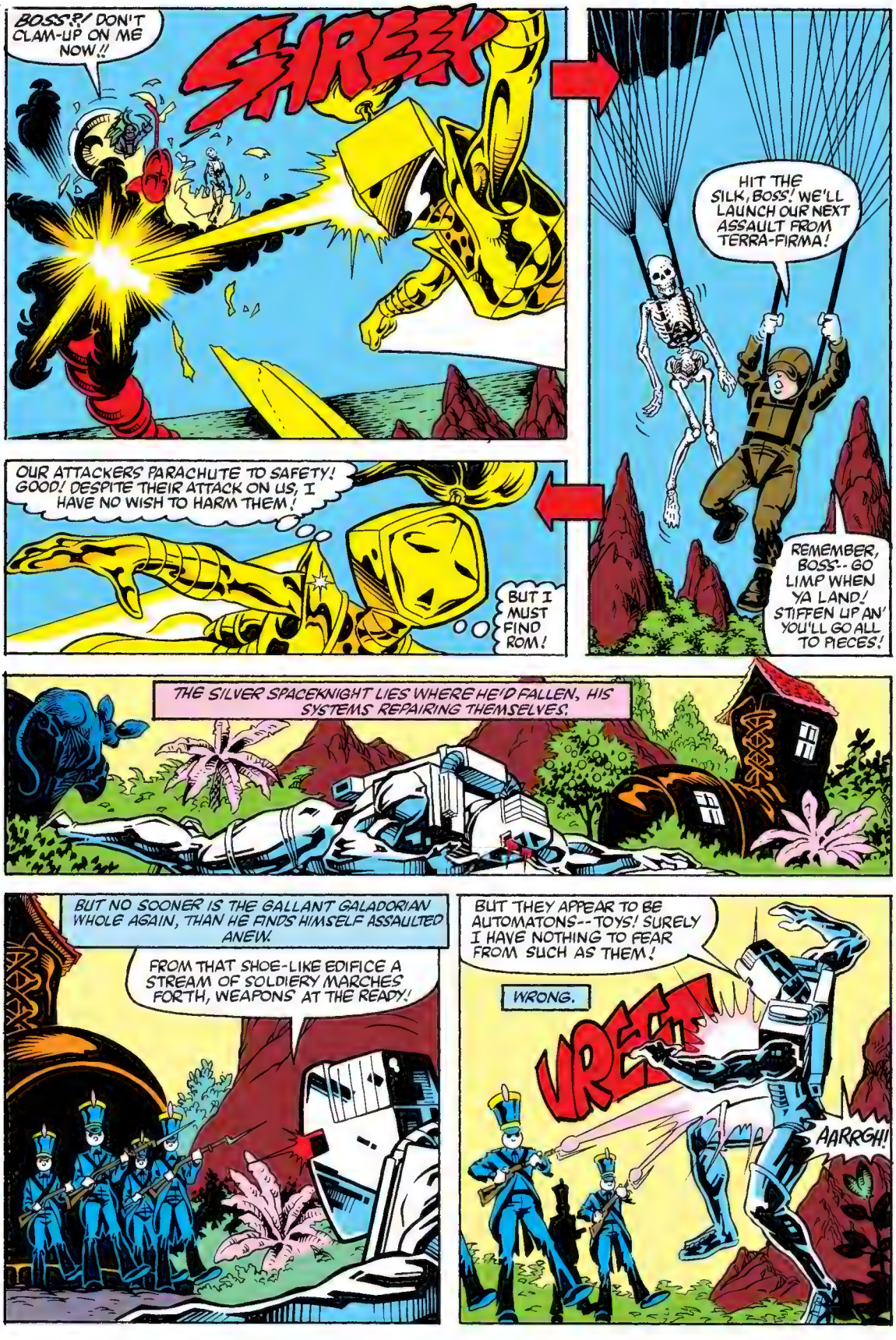

STARSHINE IS CORRECT. IN HIS FUTILE FLIGHT TO ESCAPE A CONDITION HE BELIEVES HIMSELF FOREVER UNABLE TO ALTER, ROM IS INDEED BLIND TO HIS INSANE SURROUNDINGS.
THE LIGHT-EYES OF HIS SISTER SPACEKNIGHT, HOWEVER, TAKE IN ALL.
THE FLORA OF THIS ISLAND--SPRINGING FORTH IN A THOUSAND EXOTIC FORMS--LOOKS LESS THE WORK OF NATURE--
--THAN OF SOME ANTIC ANIMATOR TAKEN LEAVE OF HIS SENSES.
WHO COULD POSSIBLY HAVE CREATED SUCH DERANGED DELIGHTS?
WHO...
...THE HECK--?!
WAIT A SEC! LEMME JUST FOCUS THE KALEIDOSCOPE!
JUST AS I SUSPECTED!

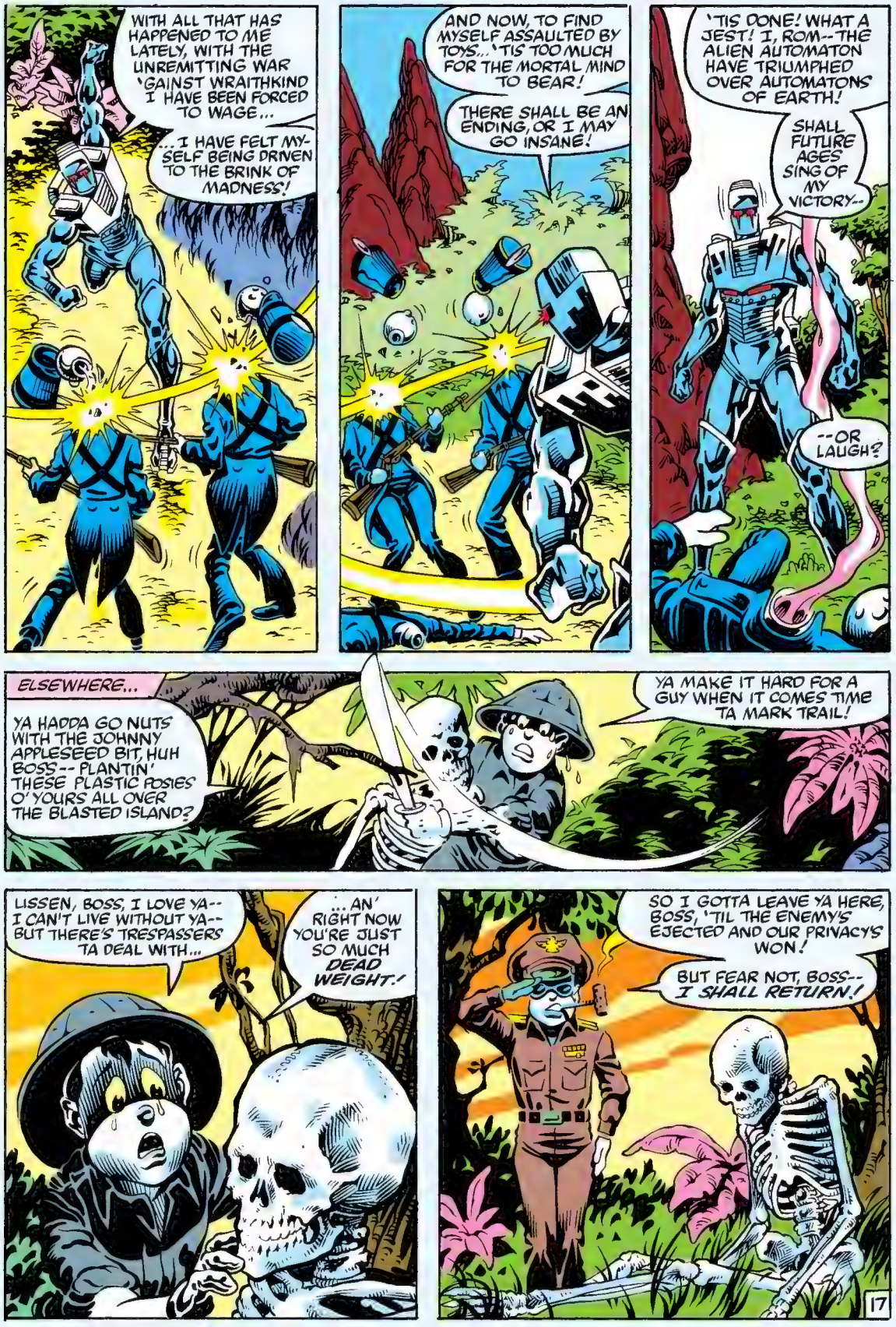
OUR KEEP'S BEEN INVADED, BOSS! THE CLOSE HAS BEEN BREACHED!
WHAT I MEAN IS, OUR SACRED RIGHT TA USE AN' ENJOY OUR PRIVATE PROPERTY FREE FROM INTERFERENCE HAS JUST BEEN VIOLATED!
TA MAKE IT SIMPLE FOR YA, BOSS--
--WE GOT TRESPASSERS!
THE QUESTION NOW IS: HOW'RE WE GONNA DEAL WITH 'EM?
I'D APPRECIATE AN ANSWER, BOSS--A LITTLE GUIDANCE!
I MEAN, YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING YOUR OWN COUNSEL--SO TO SPEAK--FOR LONG ENOUGH!
I RESPECT YOUR RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT AND ALL, BUT THIS IS GETTING RIDICULOUS!
NOTHING! NADA! YOU'RE STILL MAD AT ME, AREN'T YOU, BOSS, FOR FAILING TO KILL SHANG CHI AND THAT LEIKO WU DAME, WHEN THEY GOT ONTO OUR SCHEMES.*
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT! I'M SORRY! I DIDN'T MEAN TO MOCK YOU--THE GREAT MORDILLO!
WELL, YOU DIDN'T DO SO HOT, EITHER, WHEN YOU WERE ALIVE!
BUT YA GOTTA ADMIT, THIS PARTNERSHIP OF OURS HAS BEEN A TRIFLE ONE-SIDED--
-- SINCE YOU WENT AN' GOT YOURSELF CALCIFIED!**
* MASTER OF KUNG FU #35, AND #119--RALPH.
BUT AH CAN SEE THAT YOU ALL PLANS TUH LEAVE THE QUESTION O' THESE HERE TRESPASSERS TUH BORDER GUARD BRYNOCK! ALL RIGHT, BOSS! AH'LL DO MUH DUTY BY YUH! AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHAT YUH MADE ME FOR!
YUH WANTED SOMEONE LOYAL TUH HELP IN YUH PLANS O' INTERNATIONAL EXTORTION AND BLACKMAIL. YUH CREATED THIS LOCO BASE O' OPERATIONS TUH KEEP FROM GETTING BORED. AND BUILT ME TUH BE YUH FAITHFUL SERVANT.
12


MEANWHILE, STILL UNAWARE THAT THEY ARE UNDER OBSERVATION, ROM AND STARSHINE CONTINUE TO TRAVERSE THE BIZARRE LANDSCAPE...
ROM, LISTEN TO ME! THERE'S SOMETHING SERIOUSLY STRANGE HERE! WE SHOULD INVESTIGATE SO AS NOT TO BE CAUGHT OFF-GUARD!
IT'S NO USE! HE CAN'T HEAR ME OVER THE ROAR OF HIS ROCKET-PODS!
OR HE DOESN'T WANT TO HEAR ME-- TO BE REMINDED OF OUR LOVE!
BUT HEAR ME HE MUST--
--FOR, HAVING BEEN A SPACEKNIGHT FAR, FAR LONGER THAN I, HE IS THE MORE EXPERIENCED IN DEALING WITH SUDDEN DANGER!
AND THAT MAY BE WHAT'S HEADING OUR WAY FROM THE TOP OF THAT SKULL STRUCTURE ACROSS THE ISLAND!
COPILOT TO PILOT: TRESPASSERS AT 3 O'CLOCK! SHALL I ORDER DRAGONFLY DEATH SQUADRON TO ENGAGE 'EM? WHAT WAS THAT, BOSS? I DON'T READ YOU! THERE'S A LITTLE STATIC ON THE LINE!
OH--ATTACK? JUST WHAT I WAS THINKING! ROGER, WILCO AND OUT!
THE MECHANICAL DRAGONFLIES DRONE TOWARD THE SPACEKNIGHTS. THOUGH COMICAL IN APPEARANCE, STARSHINE SENSES THEY ARE DEADLY.
WHAT I'VE BEE EXPECTING EVER SINCE WE CAUGHT SIGHT OF THIS CRAZY ISLAND HAS COME TO PASS! WE'RE UNDER ATTACK BY THE INHABITANTS!
ROM-- THERE IS DANGER!
13

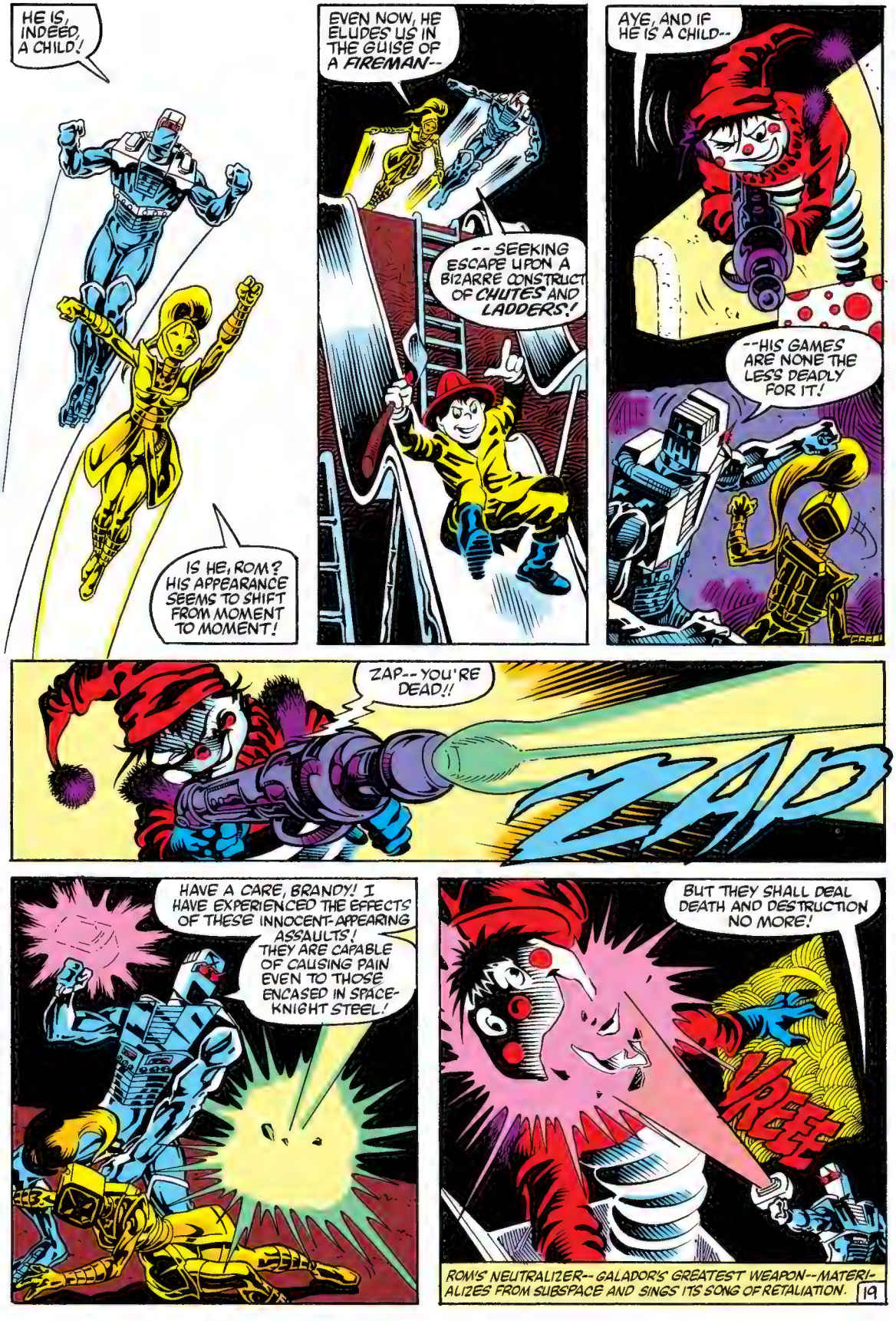
DANGER?
DANGER.
BRZZZT
BRZZT
BRZZT
AARRRGHHH!
THE SAVAGE, SEARING LASER-ASSAULT SETS ROM'S CIRCUITRY SCREAMING, SYSTEMS TEMPORARILY SHUT DOWN TO SHIELD ROM'S SANITY FROM THE PAIN.
THUS, ROM FALLS..
...UNTIL HE CAN FALL NO FARTHER.
14

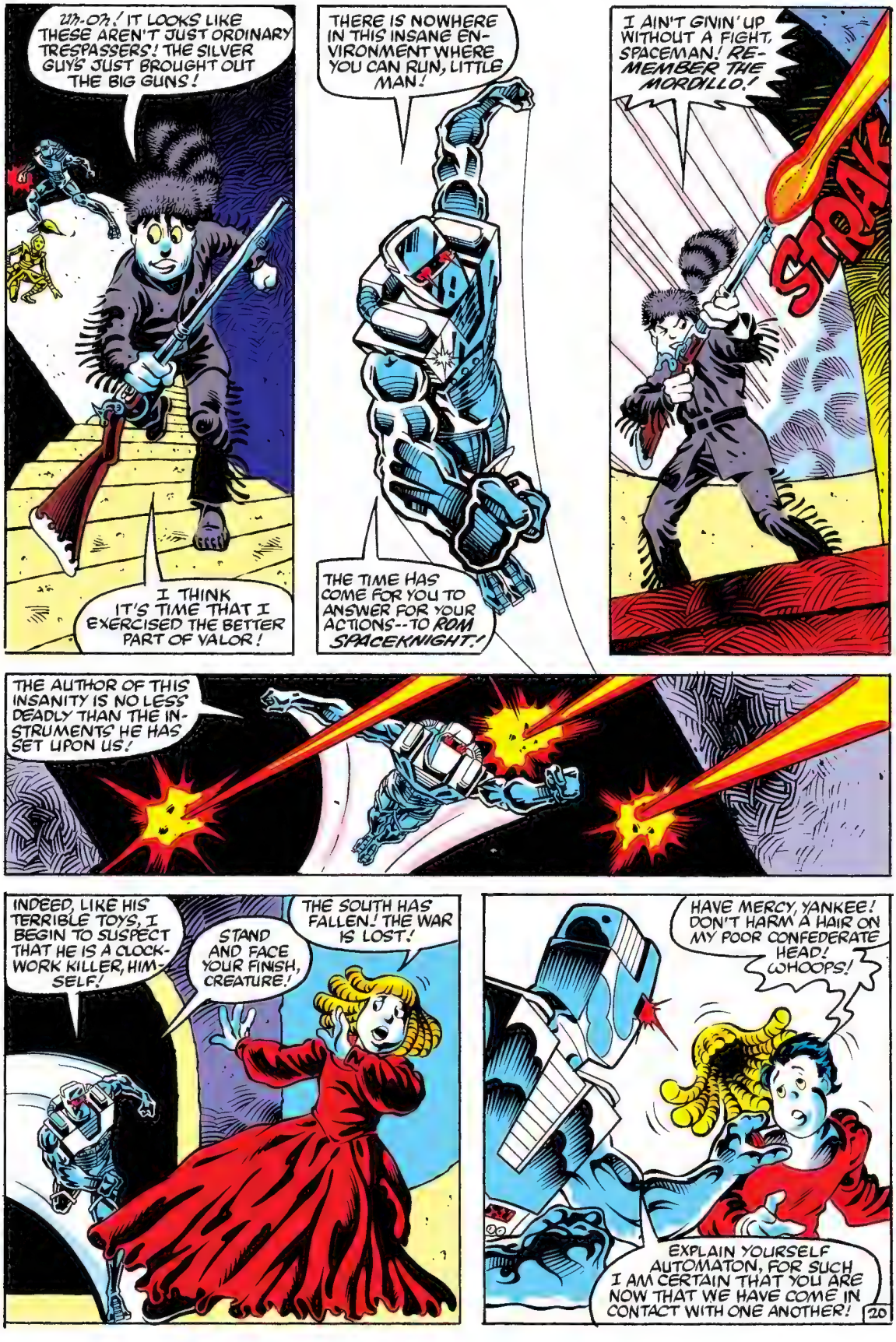

ONE DOWN, BOSS--ONE TO GO!
YOU--! WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO YOU THAT YOU WOULD STRIKE OUT AT US?!
WHAT?!
TRESPASSER #2 IS DIVING DOWN FROM 12 O'CLOCK HIGH, BOSS.
SOMETHIN' TELLS ME SHE'S AN ENEMY ACE!
WE'LL TAKE EVASIVE ACTION AN' LET THE DRAGONFLY DRONES DEAL WITH HER!
BUT IT IS STARSHINE WHOSE LETHAL LASER-LIGHT EYES DEAL WITH THE DRAGONFLY DRONES.
THOUGH SHE HAS ONLY BEEN A SPACEKNIGHT A SHORT TIME...
...BRANDY CLARK WIELDS THE GALADORIAN LIVING LIGHT AS IF SHE WERE BORN TO COMMAND IT.
UH-OH, BOSS-- LOOKS LIKE WE GOT US A LIVE ONE! SHE'S ANGRIER'N A HORNET, AN' PACKS A SUPER STING!
ATTACKIN' HER WAS YOUR IDEA, BOSS! WHAT DO YA SUGGEST NOW?
BOSS?
15

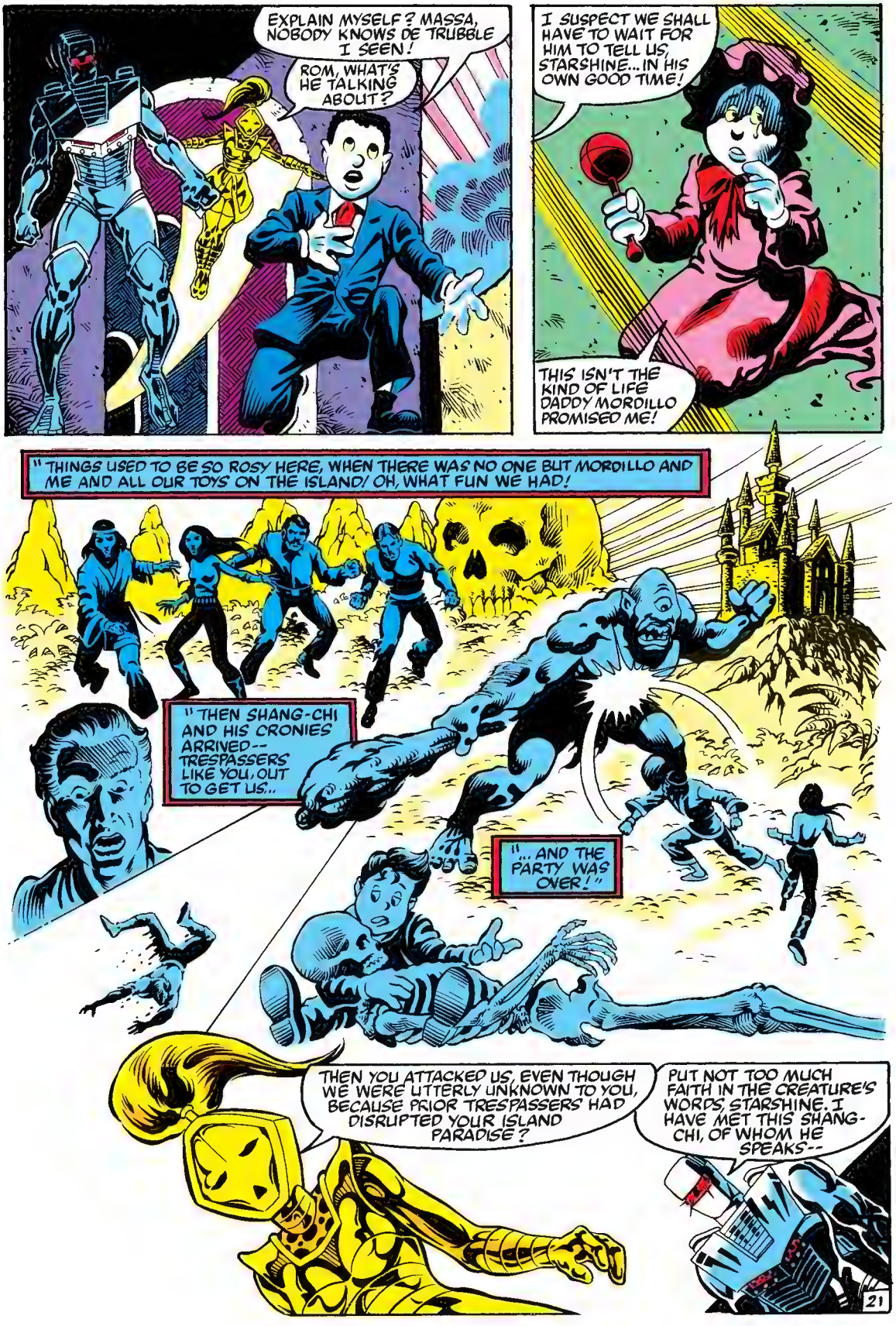

BOSS?! / DON'T CLAM-UP ON ME NOW!!
SHREEK
HIT THE SILK, BOSS! WE'LL LAUNCH OUR NEXT ASSAULT FROM TERRA-FIRMA!
REMEMBER, BOSS-- GO LIMP WHEN YA LAND! STIFFEN UP AN' YOU'LL GO ALL TO PIECES!
OUR ATTACKERS PARACHUTE TO SAFETY! GOOD! DESPITE THEIR ATTACK ON US, I HAVE NO WISH TO HARM THEM!
BUT I MUST FIND ROM!
THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT LIES WHERE HE'D FALLEN, HIS SYSTEMS REPAIRING THEMSELVES.
BUT NO SOONER IS THE GALLANT GALADORIAN WHOLE AGAIN, THAN HE FINDS HIMSELF ASSAULTED ANEW.
FROM THAT SHOE-LIKE EDIFICE A STREAM OF SOLDIERY MARCHES FORTH, WEAPONS AT THE READY!
BUT THEY APPEAR TO BE AUTOMATONS-- TOYS! SURELY I HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM SUCH AS THEM!
WRONG.
VREET!
AARRGH!


WITH ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME LATELY, WITH THE UNREMITTING WAR 'GAINST WRAITHKIND I HAVE BEEN FORCED TO WAGE...
...I HAVE FELT MYSELF BEING DRIVEN TO THE BRINK OF MADNESS!
AND NOW, TO FIND MYSELF ASSAULTED BY TOYS... 'TIS TOO MUCH FOR THE MORTAL MIND TO BEAR!
THERE SHALL BE AN ENDING, OR I MAY GO INSANE!
'TIS DONE! WHAT A JEST! I, ROM--THE ALIEN AUTOMATON HAVE TRIUMPHED OVER AUTOMATONS OF EARTH!
SHALL FUTURE AGES SING OF MY VICTORY--
--OR LAUGH?
ELSEWHERE...
YA HADDA GO NUTS WITH THE JOHNNY APPLESEED BIT, HUH BOSS-- PLANTIN' THESE PLASTIC POSIES O' YOURS ALL OVER THE BLASTED ISLAND?
YA MAKE IT HARD FOR A GUY WHEN IT COMES TIME TA MARK TRAIL!
LISSEN, BOSS, I LOVE YA-- I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YA-- BUT THERE'S TRESPASSERS TA DEAL WITH...
... AN' RIGHT NOW YOU'RE JUST SO MUCH DEAD WEIGHT!
SO I GOTTA LEAVE YA HERE, BOSS, 'TIL THE ENEMY'S EJECTED AND OUR PRIVACY'S WON!
BUT FEAR NOT, BOSS-- I SHALL RETURN!
17

WITH THAT, BRYNOCK! TAKES OFF TO DEAL WITH THE SPACE-KNIGHTS...
...LEAVING THE REMAINS OF MORDILLO--A MAN WHOSE DREAMS OF CONQUEST WERE EVER DESTABILIZED BY HIS INSANITY--ON GROUND EQUALLY UNSTABLE.
MEANWHILE...
THUS FAR I'VE SEEN NO SIGN OF ROM! BUT THAT CASTLE SEEMS TO OCCUPY A SITE AT THE CENTER OF THE ISLAND!
PERHAPS I SHOULD COMMENCE MY SEARCH FOR MY BELOVED THERE!
LISSOME, THE GOLDEN GLADIATRIX SETS DOWN IN THE CASTLE'S COURTYARD...
...UNAWARE OF HER IMPENDING DANGER ON THE BATTLEMENTS.
HUMPTY DUMPTY SAT ON A WALL, HUMPTY DUMPTY HAD A GREAT FALL...
HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR EGGS, BABY?
EASY OVER, I HOPE!
BRANDY--BE WARY!
ROM!
OH!
KR
SH
THANK THE GOLDEN GALAXY YOU HAVE SURVIVED THIS MADNESS!
YES, THIS ISLAND IS INSANE, ROM--BUT FAMILIARLY SO.
THE DANGERS WE'VE FACED ALL SEEM OF A SORT THAT MIGHT BE CONJURED FROM THE MIND OF SOME SADISTIC CHILD!
FLATTERY'LL GETCHA EVERYWHERE, GOLDILOCKS!
LOOK, OUR ATTACKER SHOWS HIMSELF!


HE IS, INDEED, A CHILD!
IS HE, ROM? HIS APPEARANCE SEEMS TO SHIFT FROM MOMENT TO MOMENT!
EVEN NOW, HE ELUDES US IN THE GUISE OF A FIREMAN--
-- SEEKING ESCAPE UPON A BIZARRE CONSTRUCT OF CHUTES AND LADDERS!
AYE, AND IF HE IS A CHILD--
--HIS GAMES ARE NONE THE LESS DEADLY FOR IT!
ZAP-- YOU'RE DEAD!!
ZAP
HAVE A CARE, BRANDY! I HAVE EXPERIENCED THE EFFECTS OF THESE INNOCENT-APPEARING ASSAULTS! THEY ARE CAPABLE OF CAUSING PAIN EVEN TO THOSE ENCASED IN SPACE-KNIGHT STEEL!
BUT THEY SHALL DEAL DEATH AND DESTRUCTION NO MORE!
VREE
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER-- GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON--MATERIALIZES FROM SUBSPACE AND SINGS ITS SONG OF RETALIATION.
19


UH-OH! IT LOOKS LIKE THESE AREN'T JUST ORDINARY TRESPASSERS! THE SILVER GUYS JUST BROUGHT OUT THE BIG GUNS!
I THINK IT'S TIME THAT I EXERCISED THE BETTER PART OF VALOR!
THERE IS NOWHERE IN THIS INSANE ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU CAN RUN, LITTLE MAN!
THE TIME HAS COME FOR YOU TO ANSWER FOR YOUR ACTIONS--TO ROM SPACEKNIGHT!
I AIN'T GIVIN' UP WITHOUT A FIGHT, SPACEMAN! REMEMBER THE MORDILLO!
STRAK
THE AUTHOR OF THIS INSANITY IS NO LESS DEADLY THAN THE INSTRUMENTS HE HAS SET UPON US!
INDEED, LIKE HIS TERRIBLE TOYS, I BEGIN TO SUSPECT THAT HE IS A CLOCKWORK KILLER, HIMSELF!
STAND AND FACE YOUR FINISH, CREATURE!
THE SOUTH HAS FALLEN! THE WAR IS LOST!
HAVE MERCY, YANKEE! DON'T HARM A HAIR ON MY POOR CONFEDERATE HEAD! WHOOPS!
EXPLAIN YOURSELF AUTOMATON, FOR SUCH I AM CERTAIN THAT YOU ARE NOW THAT WE HAVE COME IN CONTACT WITH ONE ANOTHER!
20


EXPLAIN MYSELF? MASSA, NOBODY KNOWS DE TRUBBLE I SEEN!
ROM, WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT?
I SUSPECT WE SHALL HAVE TO WAIT FOR HIM TO TELL US, STARSHINE... IN HIS OWN GOOD TIME!
THIS ISN'T THE KIND OF LIFE DADDY MORDILLO PROMISED ME!
"THINGS USED TO BE SO ROSY HERE, WHEN THERE WAS NO ONE BUT MORDILLO AND ME AND ALL OUR TOYS ON THE ISLAND! OH, WHAT FUN WE HAD!
"THEN SHANG-CHI AND HIS CRONIES ARRIVED-- TRESPASSERS LIKE YOU, OUT TO GET US...
"...AND THE PARTY WAS OVER!"
THEN YOU ATTACKED US, EVEN THOUGH WE WERE UTTERLY UNKNOWN TO YOU, BECAUSE PRIOR TRESPASSERS HAD DISRUPTED YOUR ISLAND PARADISE?
PUT NOT TOO MUCH FAITH IN THE CREATURE'S WORDS, STARSHINE. I HAVE MET THIS SHANG-CHI, OF WHOM HE SPEAKS--
21

--AND CANNOT BELIEVE THAT THE MASTER OF KUNG FU WOULD HAVE UNDERTAKEN AN ASSAULT AGAINST THIS FANTASY ISLAND WITHOUT CAUSE!
NO, THERE IS MADNESS HERE, BIRTHED IN A HUMAN MIND, PERHAPS, BUT CARRIED ON BY THIS CLOCKWORK CREATURE!
OH, SIR! HOW YOU WRONG ME!
ROM WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I WOULD FLEE THIS MECHANOID MADNESS, BRANDY!
THOUGH I MAY NEVER HOPE TO ESCAPE THE INSANITY OF MY OWN AUTOMATON EXISTENCE!
ROM, WAIT! WHERE YOU GO--I GO!
AND SO GO OUR TRESPASSERS, BOSS!
LOOKS LIKE WE DROVE 'EM AWAY BY DRIVIN' 'EM NUTS!
BOSS? BOSS! HOLY BALONEY-- I FORGOT! I LEFT YA IN THE FOREST!
DON'T WORRY, BOSS-- I'LL FIND YA!
LATER...
BOSS! WHERE ARE YA, BOSS! ANSWER ME! DON'T PLAY GAMES WITH YER LI'L PAL, BRYNOCKI!
I KNOW I LEFT YA SOMEWHERE AROUND HERE!
BUT THIS IS A BIG ISLAND-- AN' IT'S GETTIN' DARK! I-I'M SCARED, BOSS! I'VE NEVER BEEN WITHOUT YA BEFORE!
NUTHIN'! I'M ALL ALONE! AN' ORPHAN!
GEE, IT'S LONELY HERE WITH NOBODY TO TALK TO! MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE DRIVEN THOSE TWO TRESPASSERS AWAY!
I-I HOPE SOMEBODY ELSE DROPS IN SOON!
22

NEXT MONTH: **RENUNCIATION!**

OR... WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SPACEKNIGHT'S HAD ENOUGH--?!

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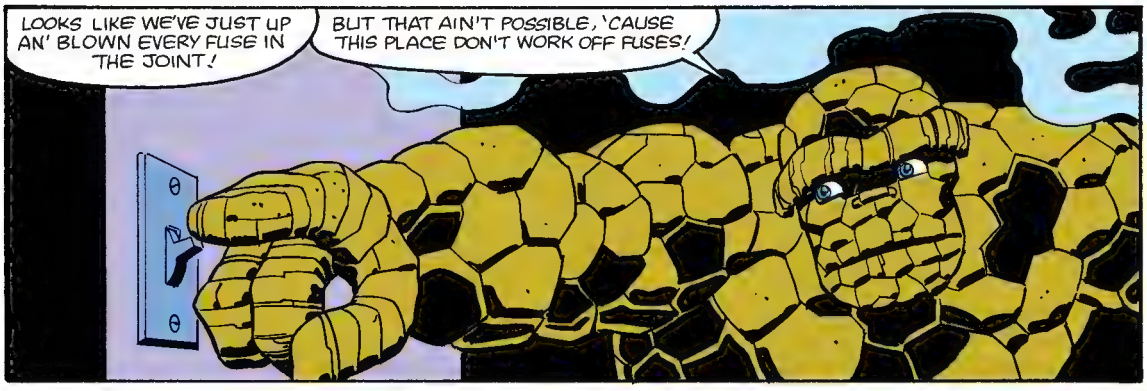
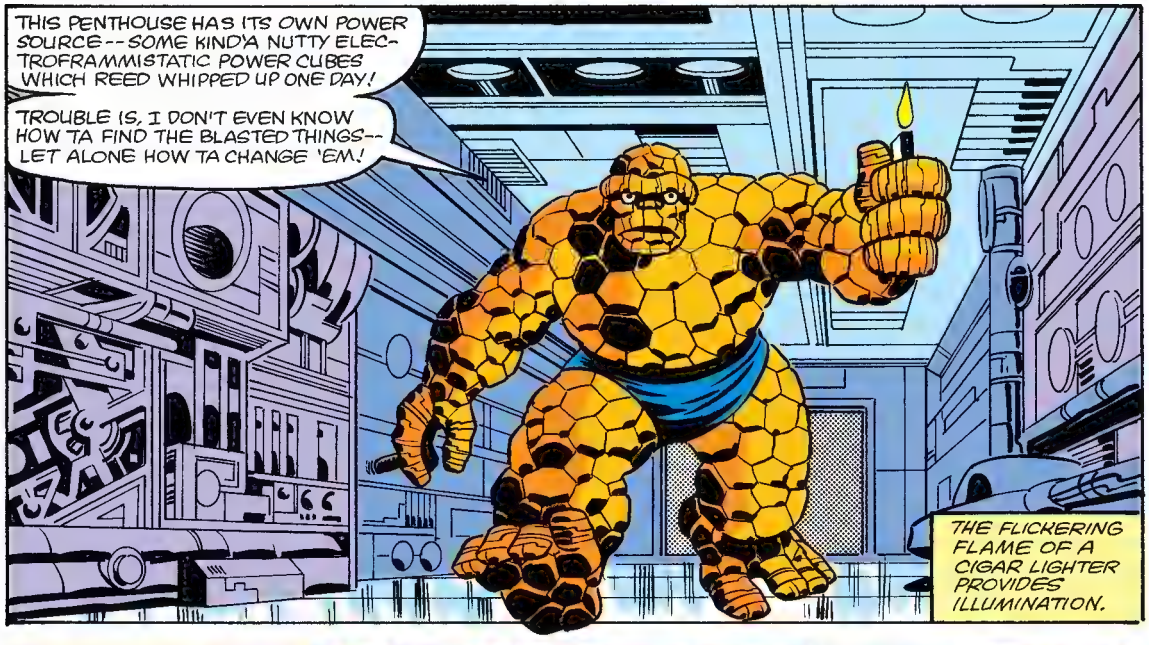
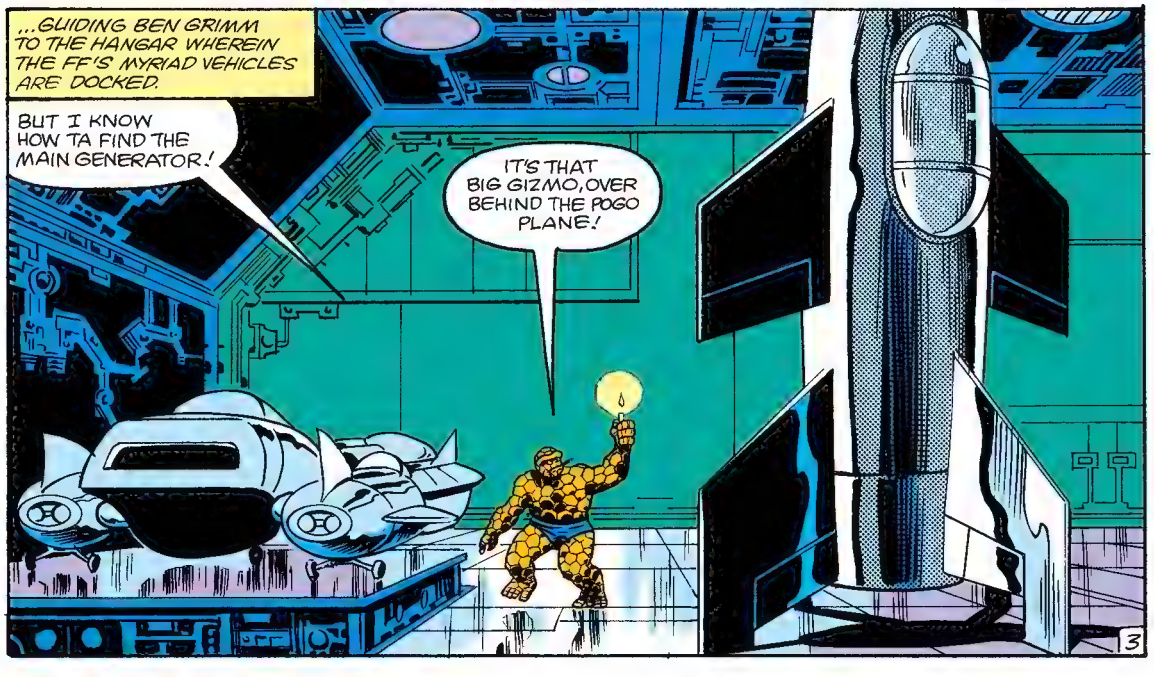
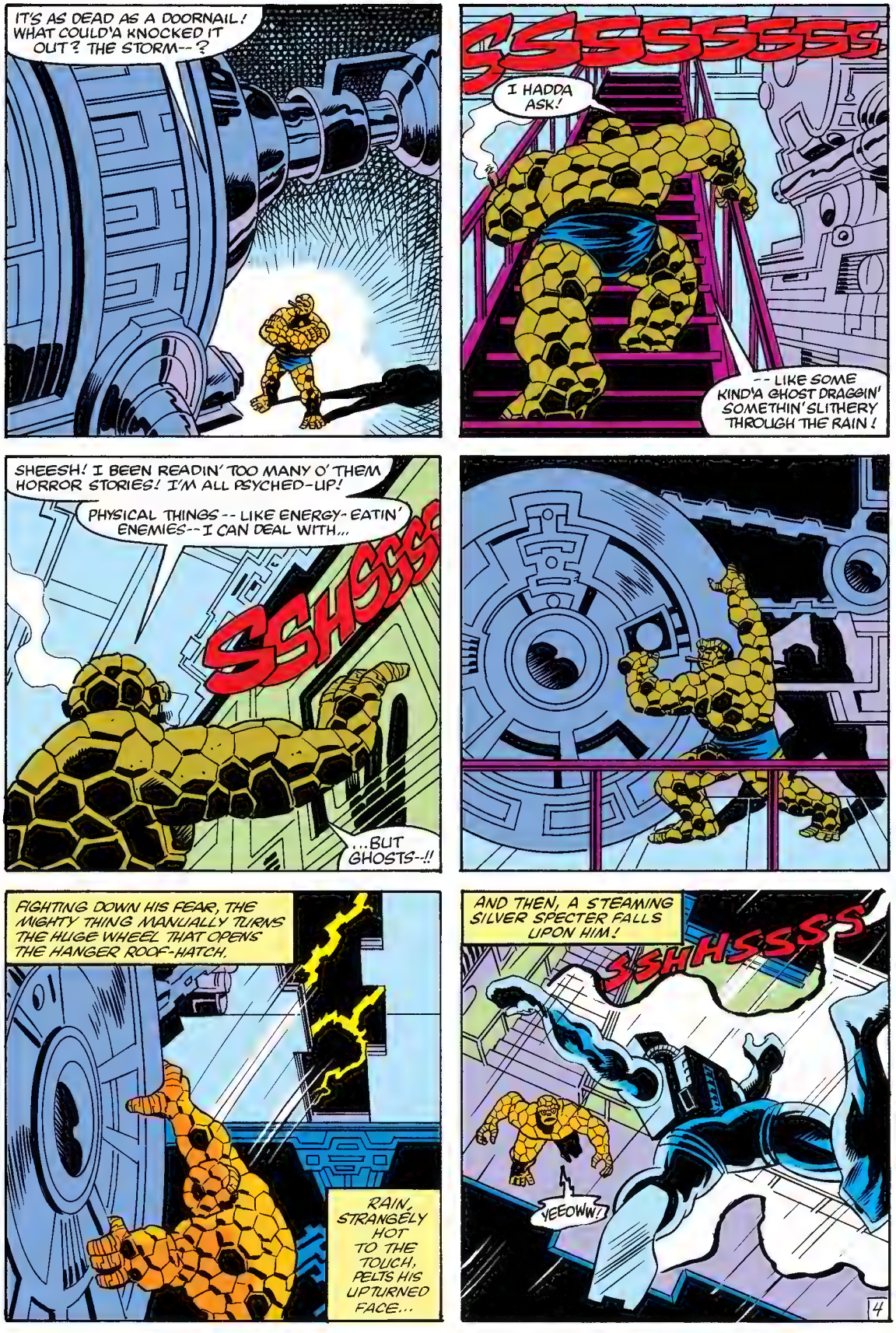
SSHSSS
HUH? WUZZAT?!
HE IS BENJAMIN J. GRIMM, THE THING, MIGHTIEST MEMBER OF THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR.
HE IS NOT ONE TO BE FRIGHTENED BY THINGS THAT GO 'BUMP' IN THE NIGHT.
OR IS HE?
GHOST STORIES FOR A RAINY NIGHT
GHOST STORIES FOR A RAINY NIGHT
1

COULDN'T HAVE BEEN THUNDER! IT WUZN'T LIKE ANYTHING I'VE EVER HEARD BEFORE!
SSSHHSSSS
THERE IT IS AGAIN!
SOUNDS LIKE IT'S COMIN' FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING ITSELF!
SKYSCRAPER HEADQUARTERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
SHEESH WHAT A STORM!
I'D REALLY HATE TO BE OUTSIDE ON A NIGHT LIKE--
--THIS ?!
ULP! WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LIGHTS--?
2

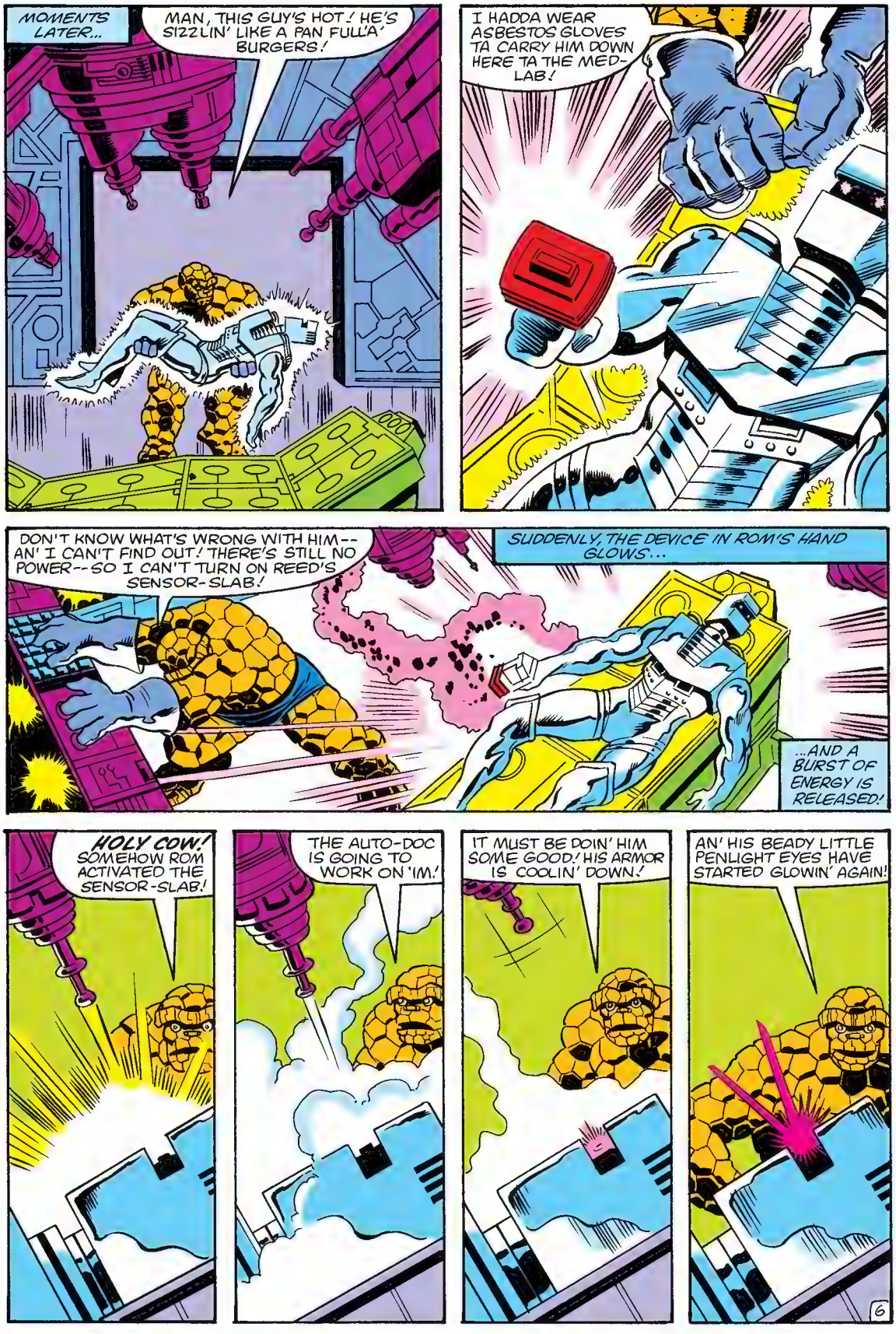

LOOKS LIKE WE'VE JUST UP AN' BLOWN EVERY FUSE IN THE JOINT!
BUT THAT AIN'T POSSIBLE, 'CAUSE THIS PLACE DON'T WORK OFF FUSES!


THIS PENTHOUSE HAS ITS OWN POWER SOURCE--SOME KIND'A NUTTY ELECTROFRAMMISTATIC POWER CUBES WHICH REED WHIPPED UP ONE DAY!
TROUBLE IS, I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TA FIND THE BLASTED THINGS--LET ALONE HOW TA CHANGE 'EM!
THE FLICKERING FLAME OF A CIGAR LIGHTER PROVIDES ILLUMINATION.

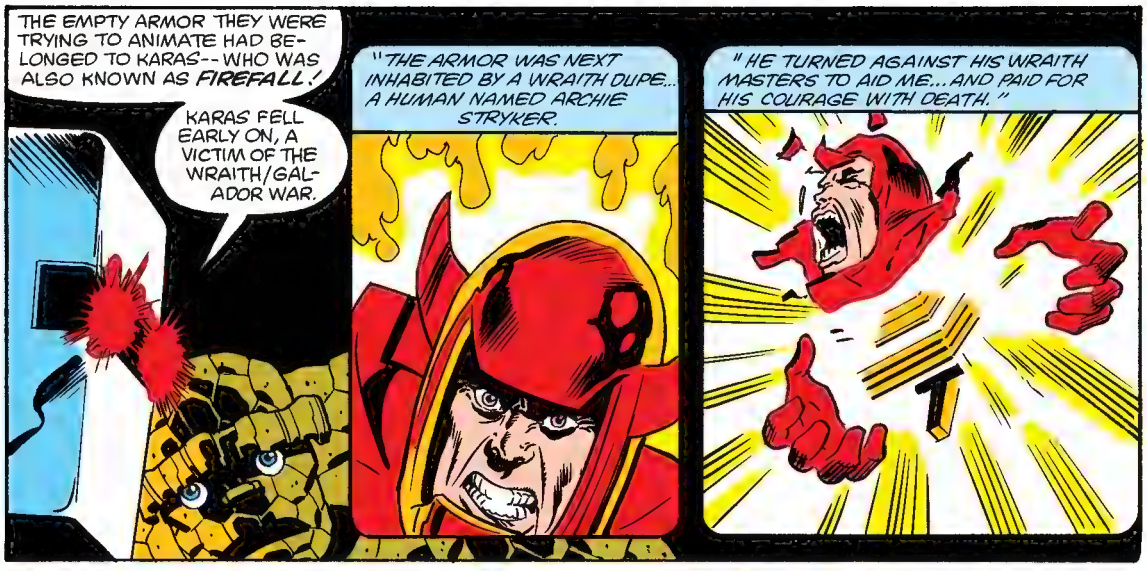

...GUIDING BEN GRIMM TO THE HANGAR WHEREIN THE FF'S MYRIAD VEHICLES ARE DOCKED.
BUT I KNOW HOW TA FIND THE MAIN GENERATOR!
IT'S THAT BIG GIZMO, OVER BEHIND THE POGO PLANE!
3


IT'S AS DEAD AS A DOORNAIL! WHAT COULD'A KNOCKED IT OUT? THE STORM--?
SSSSSSSS
I HADDA ASK!
--LIKE SOME KIND'A GHOST DRAGGIN' SOMETHIN' SLITHERY THROUGH THE RAIN!
SHEESH! I BEEN READIN' TOO MANY O' THEM HORROR STORIES! I'M ALL PSYCHED-UP!
PHYSICAL THINGS -- LIKE ENERGY-EATIN' ENEMIES--I CAN DEAL WITH...
SSHSSS
...BUT GHOSTS--!!
FIGHTING DOWN HIS FEAR, THE MIGHTY THING MANUALLY TURNS THE HUGE WHEEL THAT OPENS THE HANGER ROOF-HATCH.
RAIN, STRANGELY HOT TO THE TOUCH, PELTS HIS UPTURNED FACE...
AND THEN, A STEAMING SILVER SPECTER FALLS UPON HIM!
SSHHSSSS
YEEOWW!
4

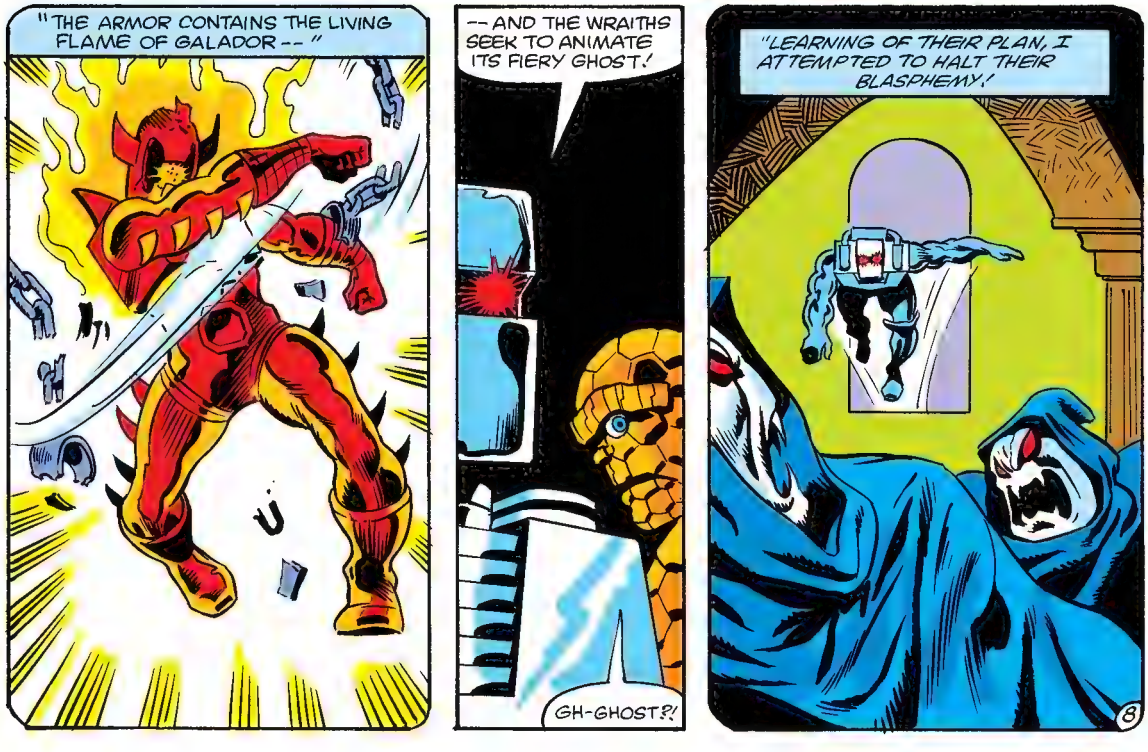
SHOCKED, TAKEN BY SURPRISE, THE THING IS CARRIED BACKWARDS OVER THE CATWALK...
YEEOWW!
... AND DOWN THE STAIRS TO THE HANGAR FLOOR.
KTLANG
WHAT KIND'A GHOST GOES..."KTLANG"?
HEY! WAIT A MINNIT! I RECOGNIZE THIS CLOWN!
ROM!
SSSHHSSS
I DON'T GET IT! HE'S A PRETTY TOUGH DUDE! WHAT COULD'A HAPPENED? WHO COULD'A CLOBBERED HIM THIS BAD?!
HIS SILVER CYBORG ARMOR STEAMING IN THE RAIN, THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS LIES STILL AS DEATH...
5

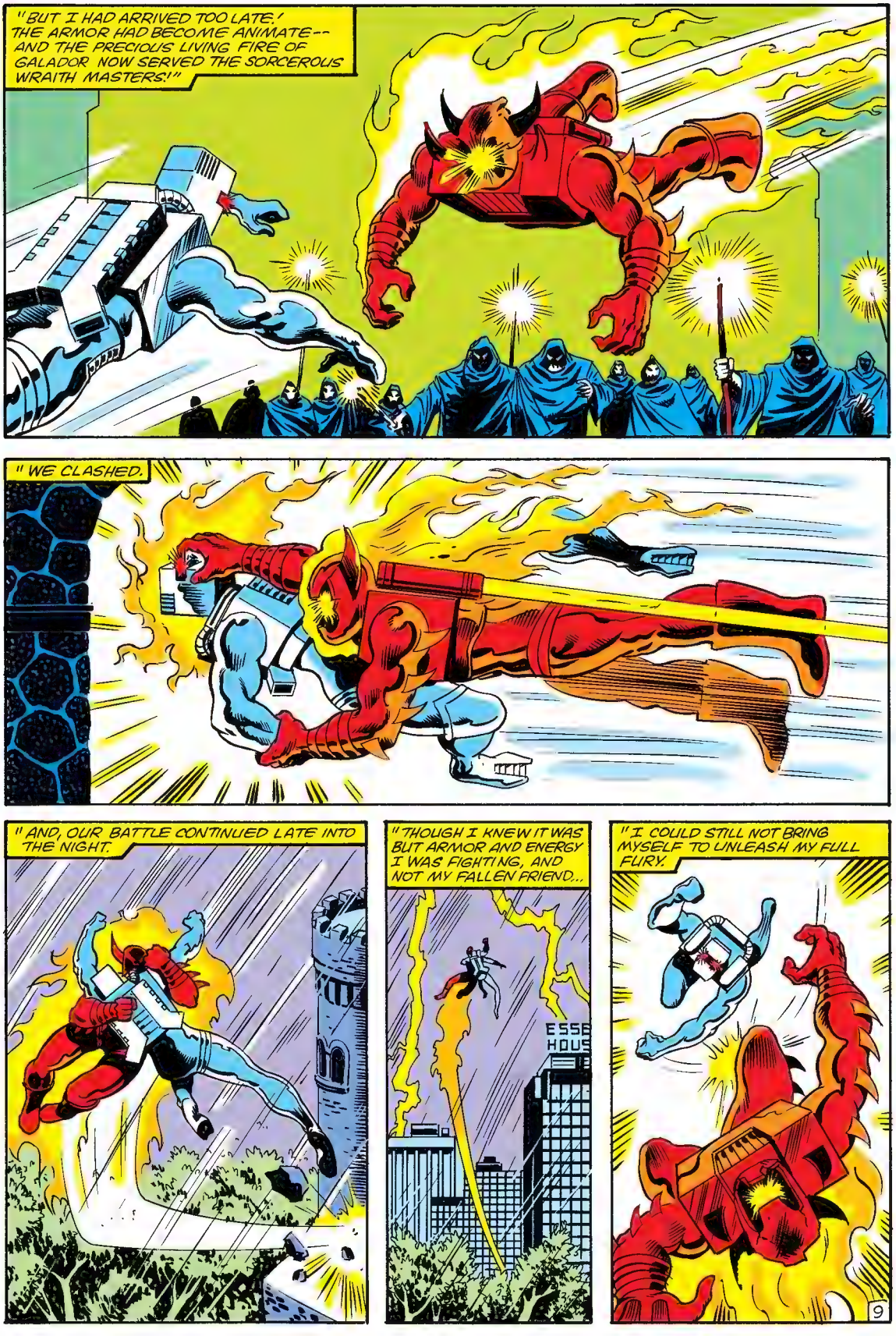

MOMENTS LATER...
MAN, THIS GUY'S HOT! HE'S SIZZLIN' LIKE A PAN FULL'A' BURGERS!
I HADDA WEAR ASBESTOS GLOVES TA CARRY HIM DOWN HERE TA THE MED-LAB!
DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM-- AN' I CAN'T FIND OUT! THERE'S STILL NO POWER-- SO I CAN'T TURN ON REED'S SENSOR-SLAB!
SUDDENLY, THE DEVICE IN ROM'S HAND GLOWS...
...AND A BURST OF ENERGY IS RELEASED!
HOLY COW! SOMEHOW ROM ACTIVATED THE SENSOR-SLAB!
THE AUTO-DOC IS GOING TO WORK ON 'IM!
IT MUST BE DOIN' HIM SOME GOOD! HIS ARMOR IS COOLIN' DOWN!
AN' HIS BEADY LITTLE PENLIGHT EYES HAVE STARTED GLOWIN' AGAIN!
6

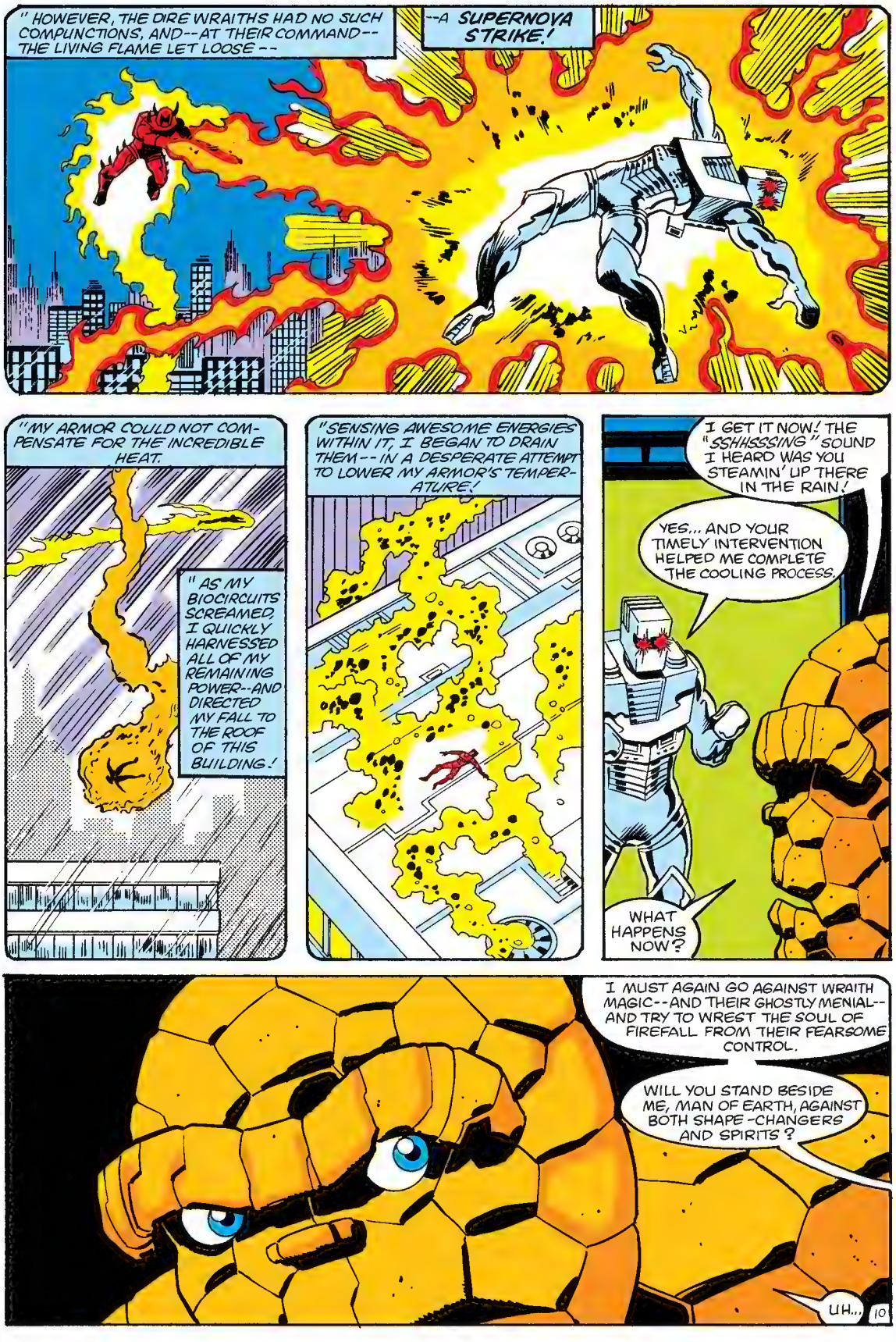
I THANK YOU, MAN OF EARTH, FOR SAVING MY CYBORG LIFE.
ANYTIME. IT WAS A--ER--SLOW NIGHT ANYWAY.
BUT WHAT'S UP? WHO TRASHED YOU?
'TIS A FEARSOME TALE. WILL YOU HEAR IT?
THE THING NODS...
"WE LAST MET WHEN MY MISSION REQUIRED THAT I RETURN TO MY WORLD, GOLDEN GALADOR...
"... AND YOU LENT ME A STARCRAFT THAT I MIGHT FURTHER MY PURPOSE. *
* SEE ROM #23--TOM.
"I AM ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, ENEMY OF WRAITHKIND--
"THAT VILE, SHAPE-CHANGING RACE THAT HAS INFESTED YOUR OWN PLANET EARTH.
"SOON AFTER, I RETURNED TO EARTH AND MY QUEST.
"THE PURSUIT OF WRAITHKIND LED ME... HERE."
TO THE... BAXTER BUILDING?
NO! TO A CASTLE IN A PARK DEEP WITHIN YOUR OWN VAST CITY.
THERE I FOUND A COVEN OF WRAITH WITCHES...
WITCHES?!
"YES, THEY WERE CASTING ARCANE SPELLS TO RAISE THE DEAD!"
7


THE EMPTY ARMOR THEY WERE TRYING TO ANIMATE HAD BELONGED TO KARAS--WHO WAS ALSO KNOWN AS FIREFALL!
KARAS FELL EARLY ON, A VICTIM OF THE WRAITH/GALADOR WAR.
"THE ARMOR WAS NEXT INHABITED BY A WRAITH DUPE... A HUMAN NAMED ARCHIE STRYKER.
"HE TURNED AGAINST HIS WRAITH MASTERS TO AID ME... AND PAID FOR HIS COURAGE WITH DEATH."

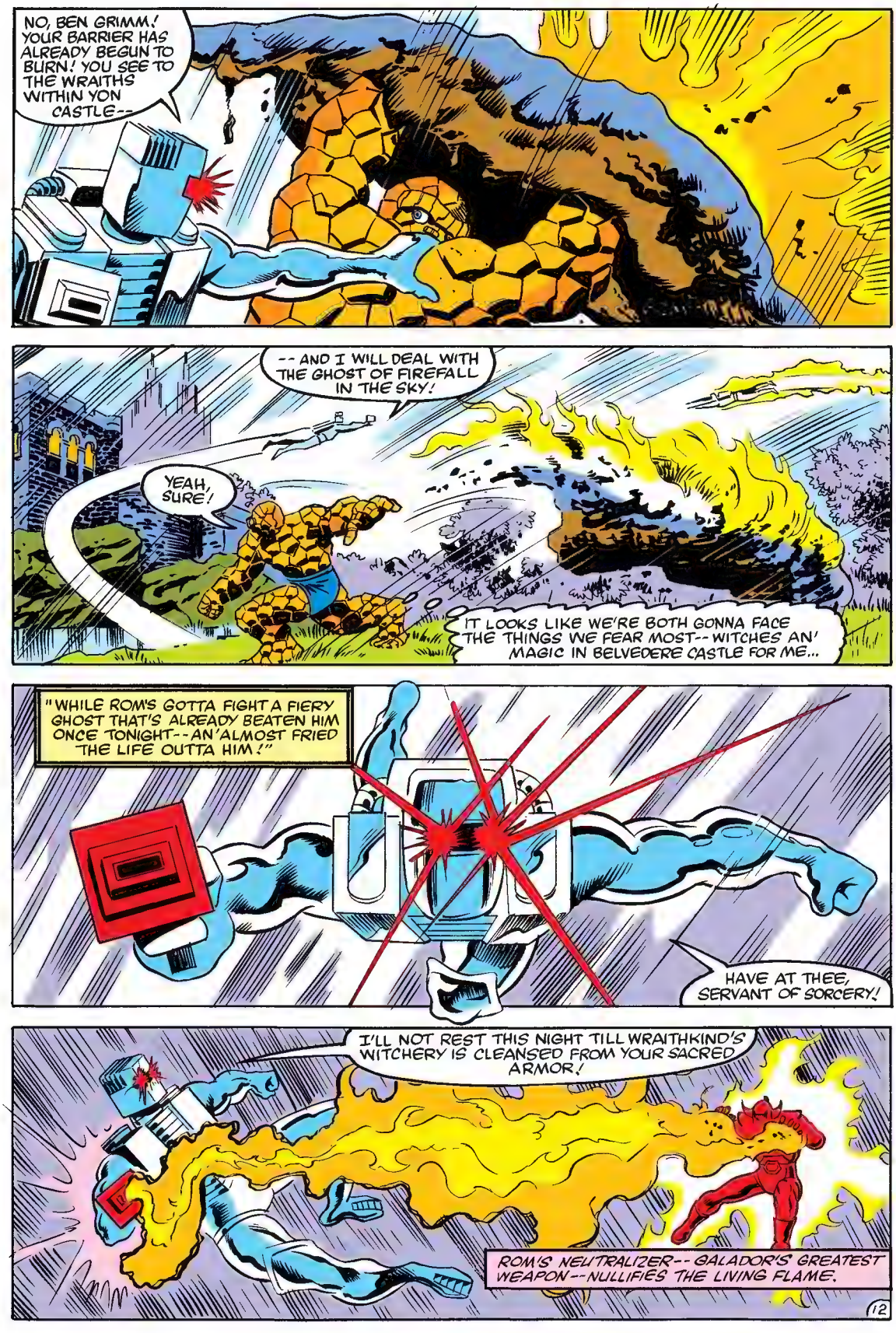
YET, THE WRAITHS STILL POSSESS THE FIREFALL ARMOR...
BUT IT'S EMPTY, AIN'T IT?


"THE ARMOR CONTAINS THE LIVING FLAME OF GALADOR--"
--AND THE WRAITHS SEEK TO ANIMATE ITS FIERY GHOST!
GH-GHOST?!
"LEARNING OF THEIR PLAN, I ATTEMPTED TO HALT THEIR BLASPHEMY!
8


"BUT I HAD ARRIVED TOO LATE.' THE ARMOR HAD BECOME ANIMATE-- AND THE PRECIOUS LIVING FIRE OF GALADOR NOW SERVED THE SORCEROUS WRAITH MASTERS!"
"WE CLASHED.
"AND, OUR BATTLE CONTINUED LATE INTO THE NIGHT.
"THOUGH I KNEW IT WAS BUT ARMOR AND ENERGY I WAS FIGHTING, AND NOT MY FALLEN FRIEND...
"I COULD STILL NOT BRING MYSELF TO UNLEASH MY FULL FURY.
9


" HOWEVER, THE DIRE WRAITHS HAD NO SUCH COMPUNCTIONS, AND--AT THEIR COMMAND--THE LIVING FLAME LET LOOSE --
--A SUPERNOVA STRIKE!
"MY ARMOR COULD NOT COMPENSATE FOR THE INCREDIBLE HEAT.
" AS MY BIOCIRCUITS SCREAMED, I QUICKLY HARNESSED ALL OF MY REMAINING POWER--AND DIRECTED MY FALL TO THE ROOF OF THIS BUILDING!
"SENSING AWESOME ENERGIES WITHIN IT, I BEGAN TO DRAIN THEM -- IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO LOWER MY ARMOR'S TEMPERATURE!
I GET IT NOW! THE "SSHHSSSING" SOUND I HEARD WAS YOU STEAMIN' UP THERE IN THE RAIN!
YES... AND YOUR TIMELY INTERVENTION HELPED ME COMPLETE THE COOLING PROCESS.
WHAT HAPPENS NOW?
I MUST AGAIN GO AGAINST WRAITH MAGIC--AND THEIR GHOSTLY MENIAL--AND TRY TO WREST THE SOUL OF FIREFALL FROM THEIR FEARSOME CONTROL.
WILL YOU STAND BESIDE ME, MAN OF EARTH, AGAINST BOTH SHAPE-CHANGERS AND SPIRITS?
UH...
10

CENTRAL PARK...
THE THING WONDERS WHY HE HAS COME HERE, TO AID THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT--A HERO HE BARELY KNOWS.
IS IT BECAUSE ROM'S ENEMIES, THE WRAITHS, ARE SHAPE-CHANGERS LIKE THE FF'S FOES, THE SKRULLS?
OR, DOES HE FEEL A CERTAIN KINSHIP WITH THIS MAN TRAPPED WITHIN AN INHUMAN BODY?
MY ENERGY ANALYZER REVEALS THAT THE WRAITHS ARE STILL HERE.
THINKING ME DEAD, THEY HAVE NOT FLED.
SUDDENLY--
FWOOSH
WHAT THE--?
'TIS THE LIVING FLAME OF GALADOR--
--HURLED DOWN UPON US BY THE SINISTER SPECTER OF FIREFALL!
GET BACK, SPACEMAN! I'VE HAD EXPERIENCE WITH FIERY RAINS BEFORE!
YOU OUGHTTA SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE WHEN MY PARTNER--THE HUMAN TORCH--TAKES A SHOWER!
THE BAXTER BUILDING'S ALL STEAMED UP FOR HOURS!
11


NO, BEN GRIMM! YOUR BARRIER HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO BURN! YOU SEE TO THE WRAITHS WITHIN YON CASTLE--
-- AND I WILL DEAL WITH THE GHOST OF FIREFALL IN THE SKY!
YEAH, SURE!
IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE BOTH GONNA FACE THE THINGS WE FEAR MOST-- WITCHES AN' MAGIC IN BELVEDERE CASTLE FOR ME...
"WHILE ROM'S GOTTA FIGHT A FIERY GHOST THAT'S ALREADY BEATEN HIM ONCE TONIGHT--AN'ALMOST FRIED THE LIFE OUTTA HIM!"
HAVE AT THEE, SERVANT OF SORCERY!
I'LL NOT REST THIS NIGHT TILL WRAITHKIND'S WITCHERY IS CLEANSED FROM YOUR SACRED ARMOR!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER-- GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON--NULLIFIES THE LIVING FLAME.
12

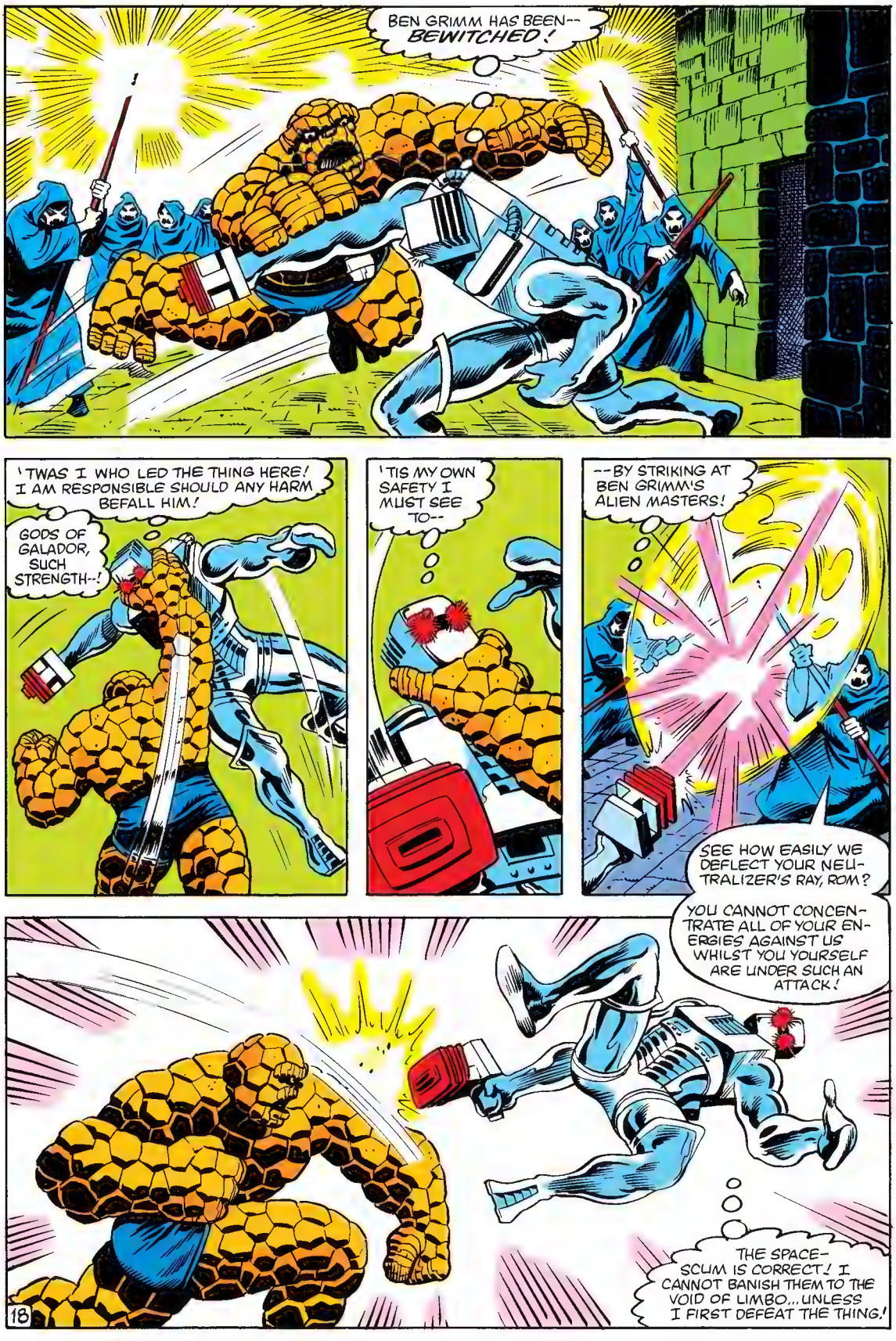
THE FLAME SCREAMS!
IT IS TRULY ALIVE-- AND I CANNOT, MUST NOT, DRAIN IT OF LIFE!
ALL THAT LIVES IS SACRED, TO BE PRESERVED.
NO MATTER WHAT THE COST TO MYSELF, I MUST NOT NEGATE A LIVING ENTITY.
--BUT THE WRAITHS MOTIVATING FIREFALL HAVE NO SUCH RESERVATIONS--
--AND THEIR MINDLESS MINION HAS JUST SET THOSE LIVING TREES ABLAZE.
A QUANDARY... MUST I TAKE A LIFE TO PROTECT A LIFE?
HAVE I NO OTHER CHOICES?
13

INSIDE BELVEDERE CASTLE...
THERE'S SOME KIND'A CHANTIN' UP AHEAD--SOUNDS LIKE DOGS SNARLIN' AT A FULL MOON! CAN'T SEE WHO'S DOIN' IT--
--BUT ALREADY THEY'VE GOT MY SCALES CRAWLIN'!
WELCOME, MAN OF EARTH--TO THE MOMENT OF YOUR DEMISE!
≥SHEESH!≤ CAN'T GIVE INTA MY FEARS! GOTTA TAKE THE OFFENSIVE!
HEY! WHAT'S HAPPENIN' TA TH' STAIRS--?
A SIMPLE SPELL, REPULSIVE ONE--
"--WHICH HAS OPENED THE DOOR TO YOUR NIGHTMARES!"
DESPITE HIMSELF, BEN SCREAMS...
... AND SCREAMS...
...AND GOES ON SCREAMING...
... AS HE IS INEXORABLY DRAWN INTO A VIOLENT VORTEX OF HIS OWN FEARS AND FANTASIES.
14

...FEARS AND FANTASIES WHICH THREATEN TO CONSUME HIM...
G-GOTTA FIGHT BACK!
CAN'T LET THESE NIGHTMARES BEAT ME!
GOTTA TAKE A DEEP BREATH, GRIT MY TEETH--
--AN COME OUT SWINGIN'!
15

HEADS UP, BOGIES! IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!!!
THE MONSTROUS ONE LUMBERS FORTH! HIS FEARS FAILED TO UNNERVE HIM!
WRAITH WITCHERY MUST THEN STRIKE IN A MORE DIRECT FASHION!
AGAIN, THE GUTTURAL CHANT COMMENCES...
WHILE, HIGH IN THE SKY OVER MANHATTAN...
FROOSH
THE MOMENT OF TRUTH DRAWS NIGH! I MUST EITHER STRIKE WITH ALL MY MIGHT AT FIREFALL'S GHOST--
--OR DIE AND BECOME A GHOST MYSELF.
BUT, SUDDENLY..
WAIT--THE ARMOR FALTERS...
AS IF THE SORCERY MOTIVATING THE SPECTER WERE BEING DIVERTED ELSEWHERE!
CONFUSED AND DIRECTIONLESS THE FIREFALL ARMOR IS ASCENDING INTO THE STORM!
16

LET NATURE AND MY NEUTRALIZER NOW END THIS DESECRATION FOR ALL TIME!
VREEOW
'TIS DONE.
NOW MAY THE SPIRIT OF FIREFALL TRULY REST IN PEACE--
--WHILE WRAITHKIND REGRETS THE DAY THEY DISTURBED A SPACEKNIGHT'S FINAL SLEEP!
ENRAGED, ROM ENTERS THE ANCIENT EDIFICE, BUT THEN--
OH, NO! IT CANNOT BE!
SURPRISED, SPACEKNIGHT? YOU DESTROYED ONE OF OUR SERVANTS--
--AND SO WE DIVERTED OUR POWER TO THE MAKING OF ANOTHER!
17


BEN GRIMM HAS BEEN-- BEWITCHED!
'TWAS I WHO LED THE THING HERE! I AM RESPONSIBLE SHOULD ANY HARM BEFALL HIM!
GODS OF GALADOR, SUCH STRENGTH--!
'TIS MY OWN SAFETY I MUST SEE TO--
--BY STRIKING AT BEN GRIMM'S ALIEN MASTERS!
SEE HOW EASILY WE DEFLECT YOUR NEUTRALIZER'S RAY, ROM?
YOU CANNOT CONCENTRATE ALL OF YOUR ENERGIES AGAINST US WHILST YOU YOURSELF ARE UNDER SUCH AN ATTACK!
THE SPACE-SCUM IS CORRECT! I CANNOT BANISH THEM TO THE VOID OF LIMBO... UNLESS I FIRST DEFEAT THE THING!
18

TWICE TONIGHT I HAVE BEEN FORCED TO HURT A FRIEND--IN ORDER TO FIGHT A FOE!
I WOULD THERE WERE SOME OTHER WAY--BUT THIS IS WAR, AND ALL EARTH WOULD SUFFER IF I SHIRK MY SPACEKNIGHT'S DUTY.
SURELY BEN GRIMM WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT... IF HE WERE ABLE!
SLAY HIM, REPUGNANT ONE!
USE YOUR AWESOME MIGHT TO SLAY THE SPACEKNIGHT... NOW!
NO!
SHOULD I FALL, THERE WOULD BE NO ONE TO WARN EARTH ABOUT THE WRAITH INFESTATION!
FORGIVE ME, FRIEND THING, BUT TO SAVE YOUR PLANET--I MUST NOW NEUTRALIZE YOU!
19

GATES OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY--!
SCOURGE OF THE SACRED SHADOWS--!
BOTH SPACEKNIGHT AND WRAITHKIND STAND TRANSFIXED BY THE UNNERVING SIGHT BEFORE THEM! THE THING, BORN IN A SHOWER OF COSMIC RAYS, IS A CREATION OF COSMIC ENERGY--BUT ROM'S NEUTRALIZER CAN NEGATE ANY FORM OF ENERGY!
I'M NOT THE THING ANYMORE! I'M BEN GRIMM--A MAN!
20

AND THE WRAITH SPELL OVER ME IS BROKEN!
THE MAN OF EARTH FIGHTS WITH FURY!
SO SUDDEN AND SO FIERCE IS HIS ASSAULT, THAT THE WRAITHS HAVE YET TO MOUNT A DEFENSE!
NOW THAT THEY ARE DISORIENTED, 'TIS TIME FOR MY NEUTRALIZER--
--TO SING ITS SONG OF BANISHMENT!
TOUCHED BY THE CRIMSON BEAM, THE WRAITHS ARE SWEPT AWAY--
YEEARG!
WHAT'S HAPPENIN', ROM? WHAT'RE YA' DOING TO THESE SPACE SCUM?
21

"BANISHING THEM, BEN GRIMM...
"...TO A SHAPELESS, OTHER-DIMENSIONAL VOID WHERE THEIR VILLAINY CAN DO NO HARM, BANISHING THEM TO A PLACE CALLED... LIMBO!"
SHEESH! EXCEPT FOR THE ONE I'M FIGHTING, ALL THE WRAITHS ARE GONE--
--AN' HE'S TURNIN' INTA ASH!
WORRY NOT, BEN GRIMM! HE WAS MERELY BANISHED TO LIMBO LIKE THE OTHERS.
BUT...
THIS IS WAR! THERE ARE CASUALTIES IN WAR.
YA DON'T HAVETA TELL ME ABOUT WAR. I USETA BE A FIGHTER PILOT.
BUT, WHAT'VE YA DONE TA ME?
I'M NOT A MONSTER ANYMORE! I'M A MAN! A MAN!
I DID NOT SUSPECT THAT A MAN DWELT WITHIN YOUR MONSTROUS FORM--WHEN I FIRST TRAINED MY NEUTRALIZER UPON YOU.
ARE YOU NOT GLAD TO HAVE RECLAIMED THE HUMANITY YOU LOST?
NO, BLAST IT! I AIN'T GLAD!
22

WHY NOT? I WAS ONCE A MAN--'TIL THE WAR FORCED ME TO SACRIFICE MY HUMANITY FOR SPACEKNIGHT STEEL. I WOULD GIVE ALL TO BE HUMAN AGAIN.
THAT'S HOW I USED TA' FEEL, BUT THERE'S THIS LADY--ALICIA MASTERS--WHO LOVES ME AS THE THING! I-I DON'T KNOW HOW SHE'D FEEL ABOUT BEN GRIMM, THE MAN!
CHANGE ME BACK, SPACE-KNIGHT!
ALAS, I-I CANNOT. MY NEUTRALIZER CAN ONLY NEGATE ENERGY--IT CANNOT RESTORE IT.
THEN YOU'VE DONE WHAT REED RICHARDS COULD NEVER DO... PERMANENTLY! AN' I'M STUCK--!
HEY! WHAT'S HAPPENIN' NOW?
I'M CHANGIN' BACK ALL BY MYSELF! I'M THE THING AGAIN!
I THINK I UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED. SO POWERFUL ARE THE COSMIC RAYS IN YOUR CELLS--THAT MY NEUTRALIZER COULD NOT NEGATE THEM FOR LONG.
YOU HAVE YOUR WISH, BEN GRIMM. YOU ARE A MONSTER AGAIN.
YEAH! HOW 'BOUT THAT?!
THANK YOU, MY FRIEND, FOR ENLISTING THIS DAY TO AID ME IN THE WRAITH WAR!
FERGIT IT, PAL! IF YA EVER NEED ME TA FIGHT THEM UGLIES AGAIN--JUST GIVE ME A CALL!
I'M IN THE BOOK--THE ORANGE PAGES!
BE HERE FOR THE EXTRA SPECIAL, DOUBLE-SIZED ISSUE #100. IT'LL BE CLOBBERIN' TIME!

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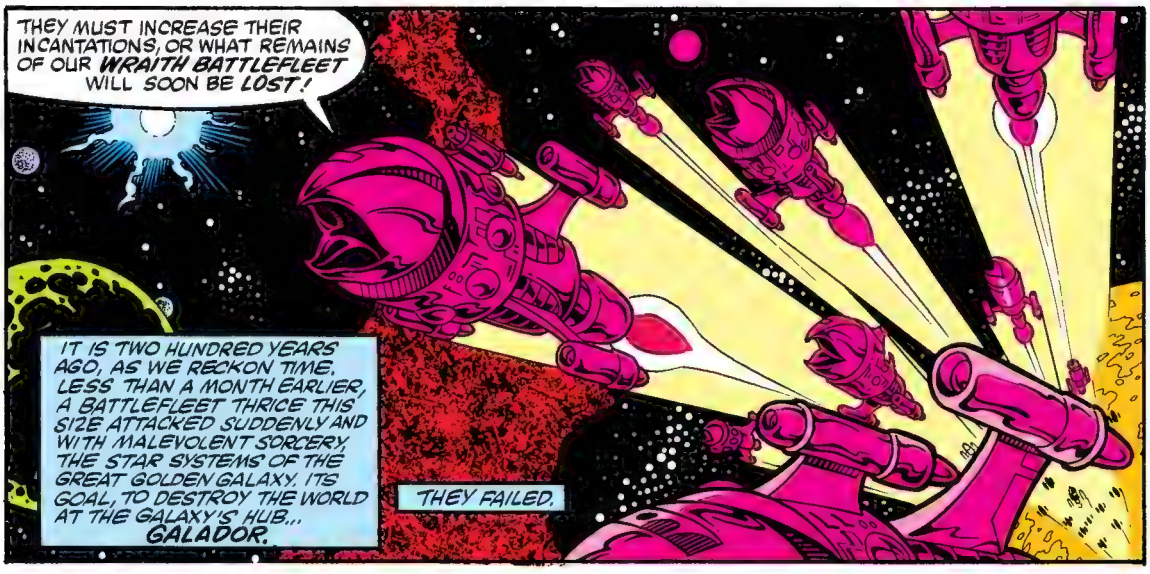
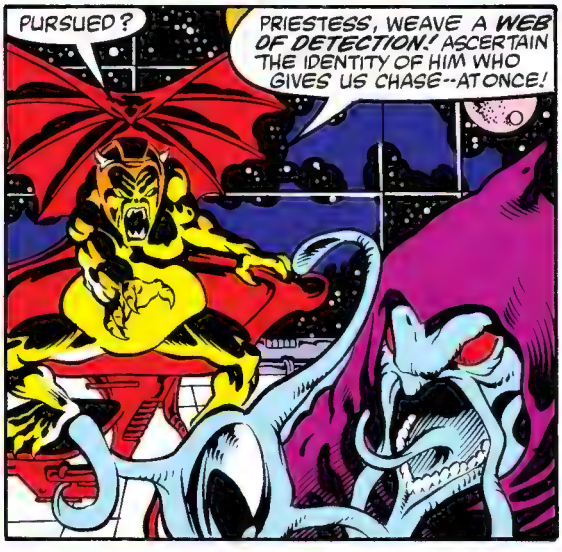
ANNUAL

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPT * SAL BUSCEMA PENCILER * AKIN & GARVEY EMBELLISHERS * RICK PARKER LETTERER * BEN SEAN COLORS * RALPH MACCHIO EDITOR * JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
PROLOGUE...
WHIP THE WARP WITCHES BLOODY, IF YOU MUST, BUT I WANT MORE POWER FROM THEIR INFERNAL INCANTATIONS!
NEVER HAVE OUR SORCEROUS SISTERS BEEN CALLED UPON TO WEAVE SUCH SPELLS FOR SO LONG, WRAITH COMMANDER!
THE STRAIN OF PHASING OUR ENTIRE FLEET THROUGH NETHER-SPACE IS DECIMATING THEIR RANKS!
THEY DARE NOT GO ANY FASTER!
1

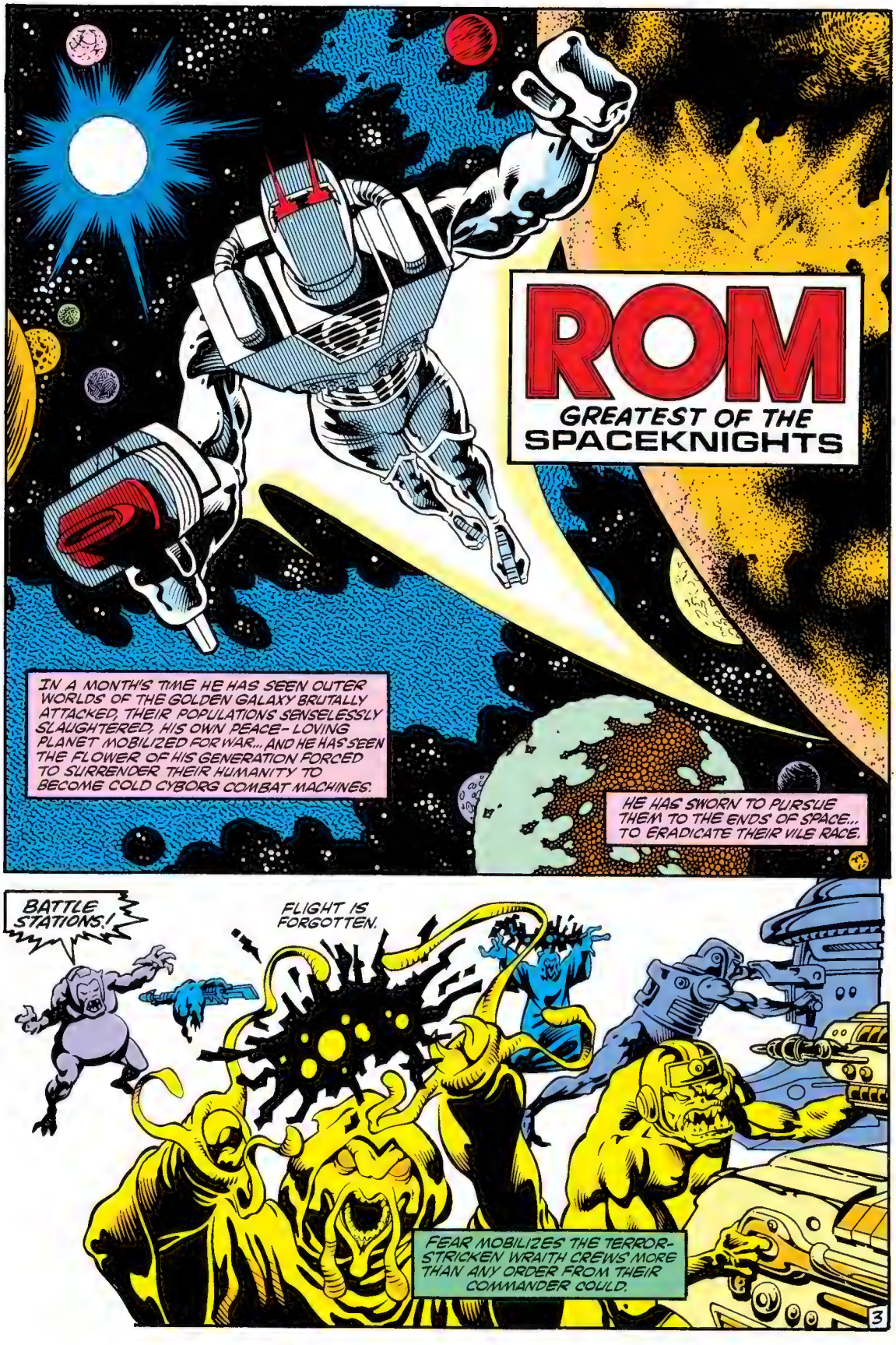

THEY MUST INCREASE THEIR INCANTATIONS, OR WHAT REMAINS OF OUR WRAITH BATTLEFLEET WILL SOON BE LOST!
IT IS TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, AS WE RECKON TIME. LESS THAN A MONTH EARLIER, A BATTLEFLEET THRICE THIS SIZE ATTACKED SUDDENLY AND WITH MALEVOLENT SORCERY. THE STAR SYSTEMS OF THE GREAT GOLDEN GALAXY. ITS GOAL, TO DESTROY THE WORLD AT THE GALAXY'S HUB... GALADOR.
THEY FAILED.

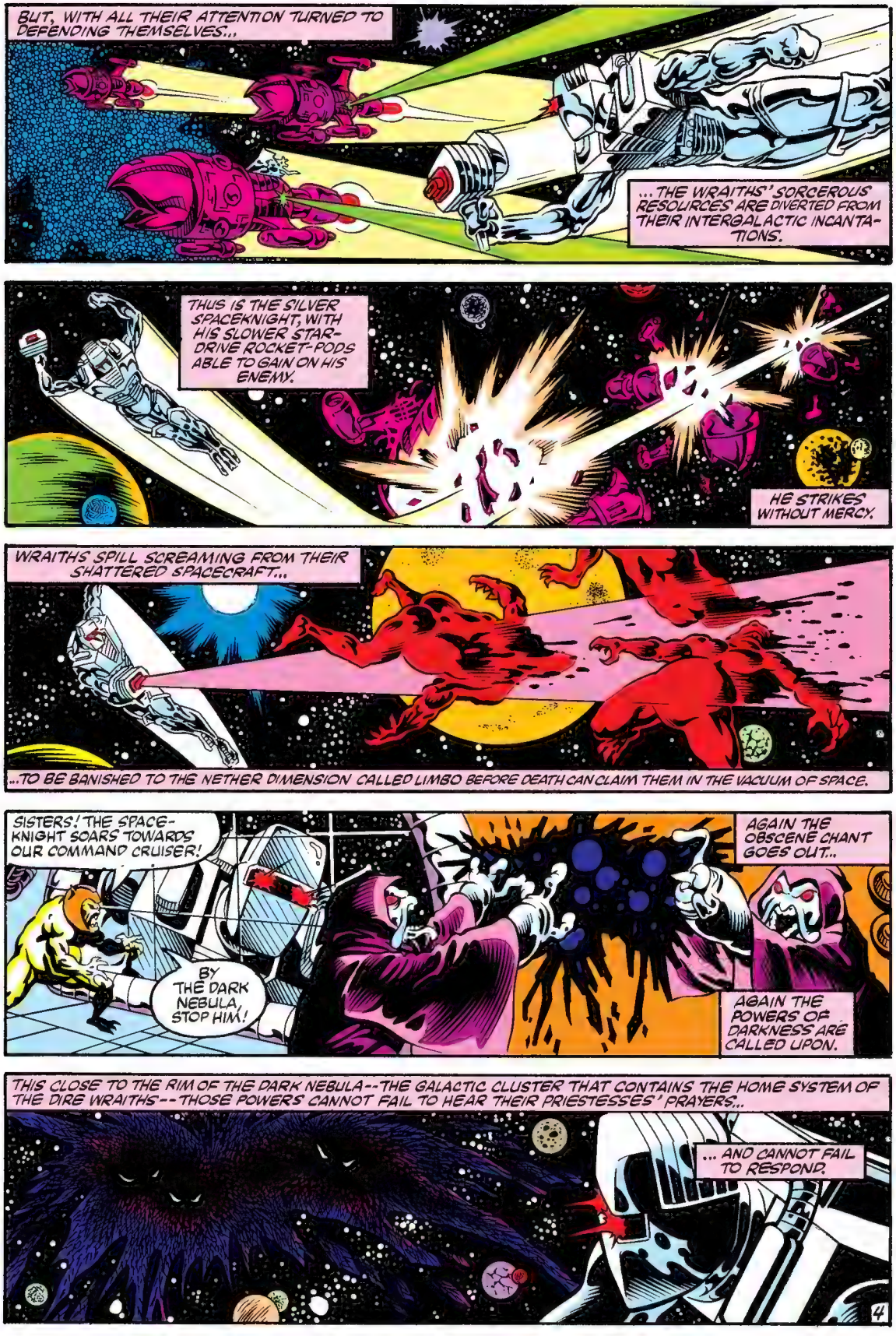
THE GALADORIAN DEFENDERS CRIPPLED SO MANY OF OUR SHIPS -- SLEW SO MANY OF OUR SORCERESSES-- THAT WE ARE LUCKY TO BE ABLE TO LIMP BACK TO...
COMMANDER! A SUDDEN INDICATION ON THE ELDRITCH-ENERGY SCANNER!
WE ARE BEING PURSUED!

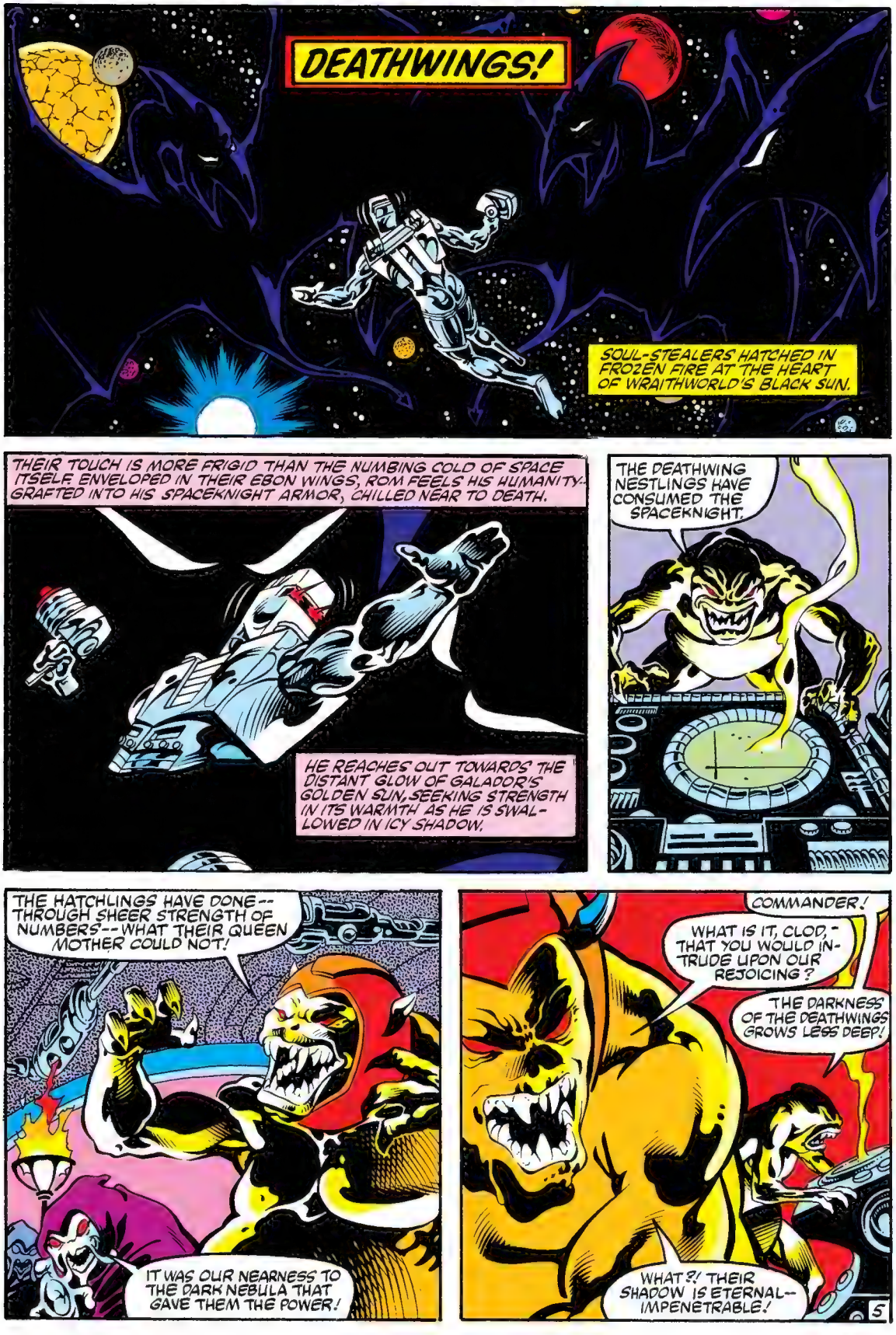

PURSUED?
PRIESTESS, WEAVE A WEB OF DETECTION! ASCERTAIN THE IDENTITY OF HIM WHO GIVES US CHASE--AT ONCE!

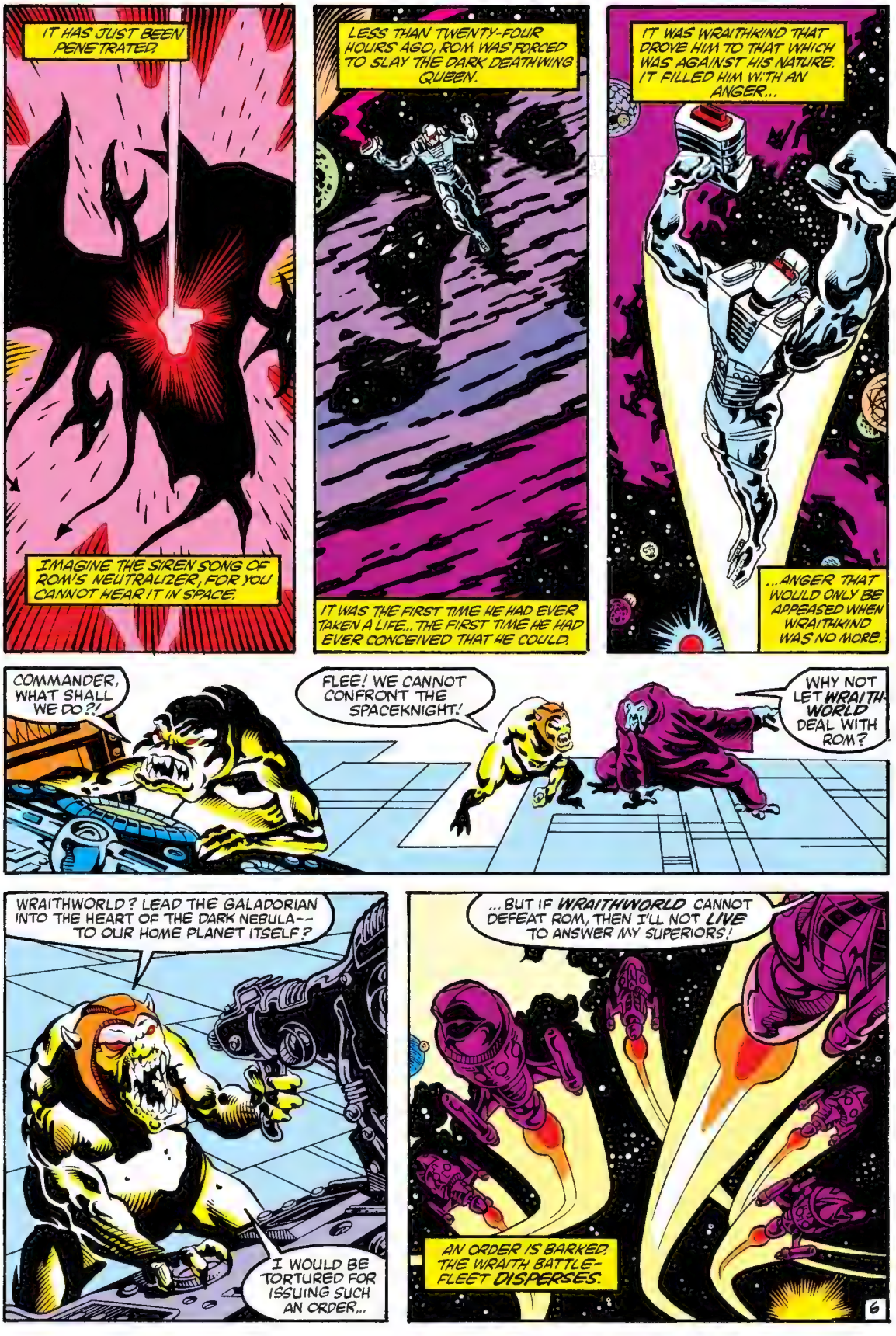
THE WITCH DOES AS SHE IS BID.

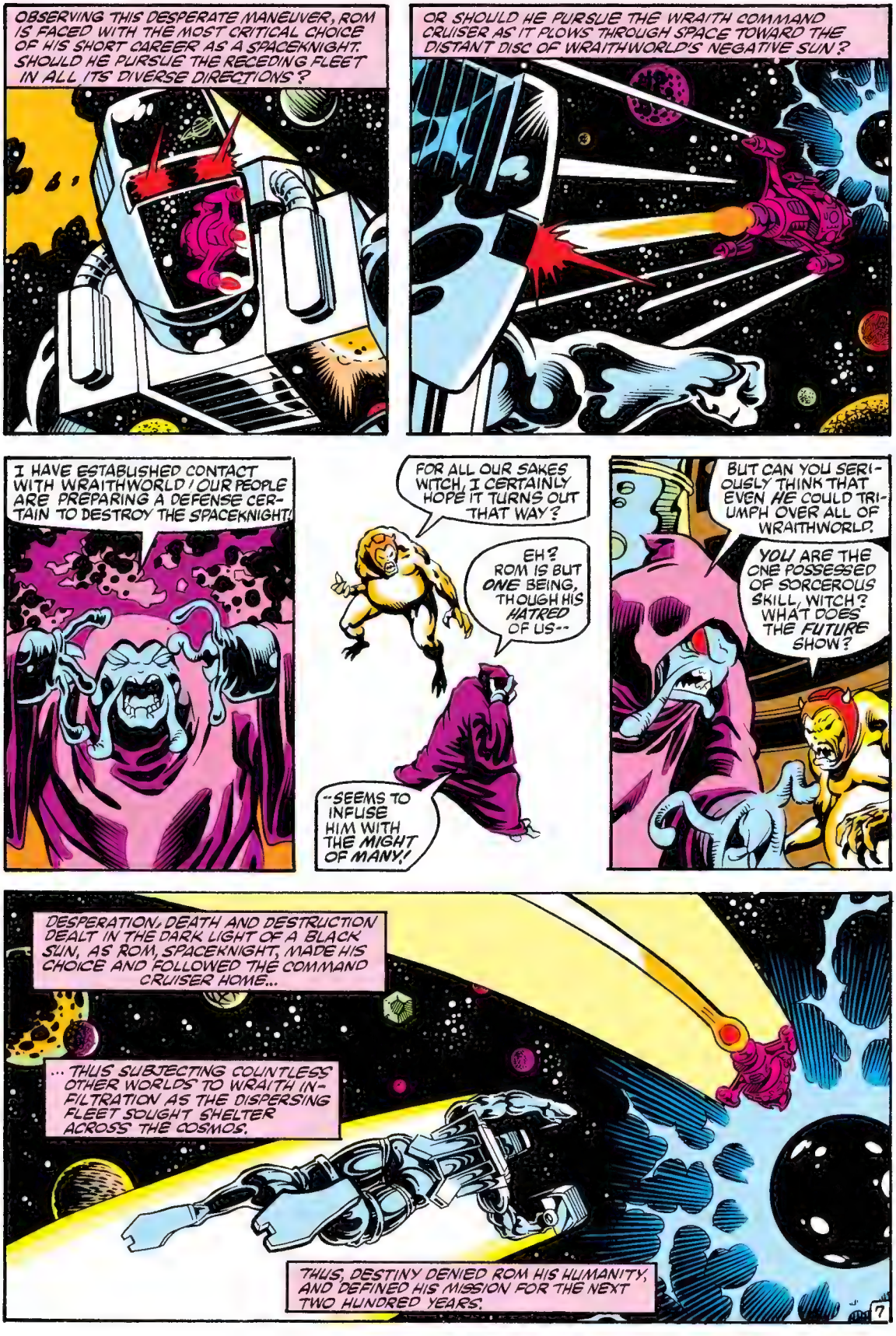
ELDRITCH ENERGIES FLOW FROM HER FINGERTIPS OUT INTO SPACE, REVEALING...
2

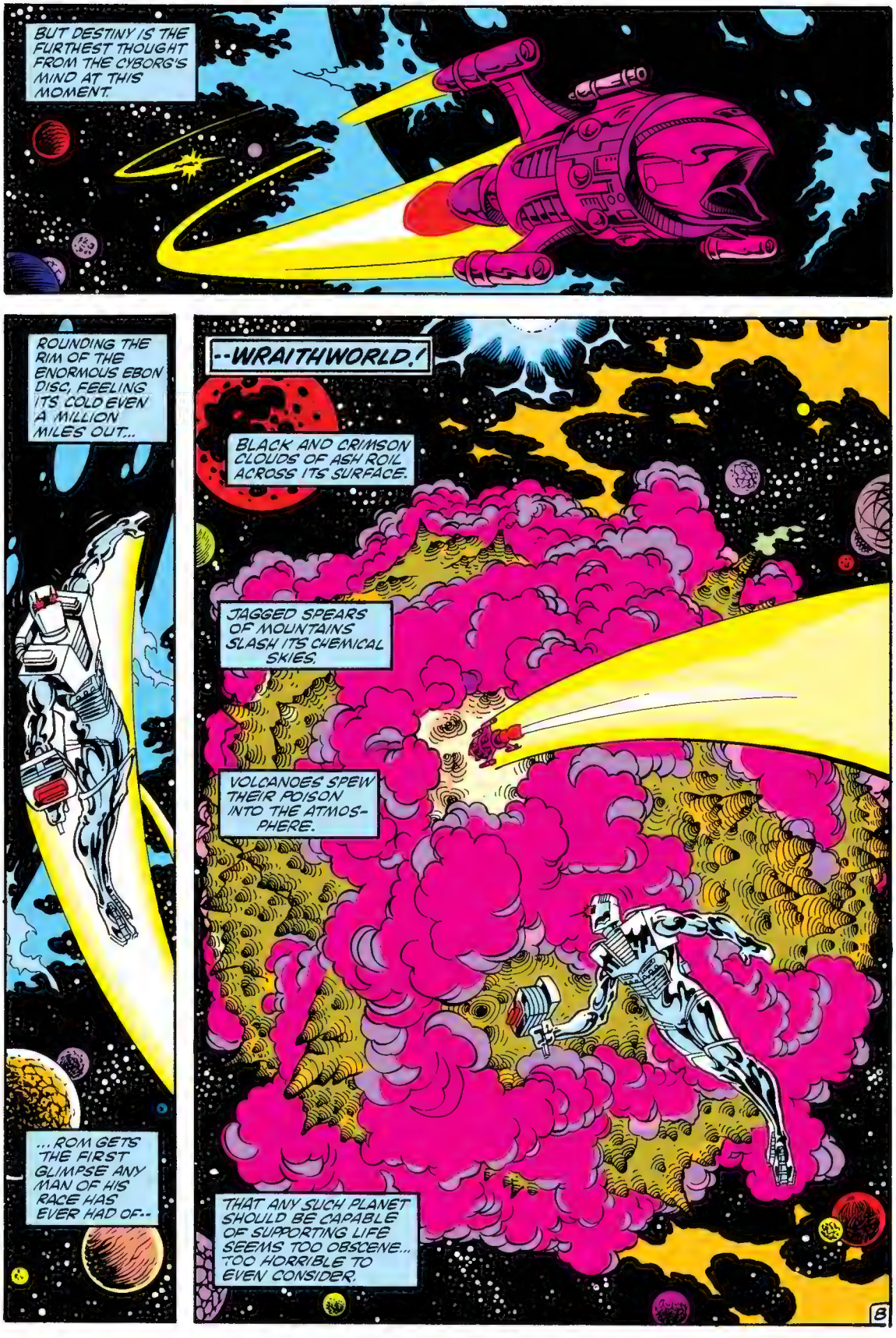

ROM
GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS
IN A MONTH'S TIME HE HAS SEEN OUTER WORLDS OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY BRUTALLY ATTACKED, THEIR POPULATIONS SENSELESSLY SLAUGHTERED, HIS OWN PEACE-LOVING PLANET MOBILIZED FOR WAR... AND HE HAS SEEN THE FLOWER OF HIS GENERATION FORCED TO SURRENDER THEIR HUMANITY TO BECOME COLD CYBORG COMBAT MACHINES.
HE HAS SWORN TO PURSUE THEM TO THE ENDS OF SPACE... TO ERADICATE THEIR VILE RACE.
BATTLE STATIONS!
FLIGHT IS FORGOTTEN.
FEAR MOBILIZES THE TERROR-STRICKEN WRAITH CREWS MORE THAN ANY ORDER FROM THEIR COMMANDER COULD.
3

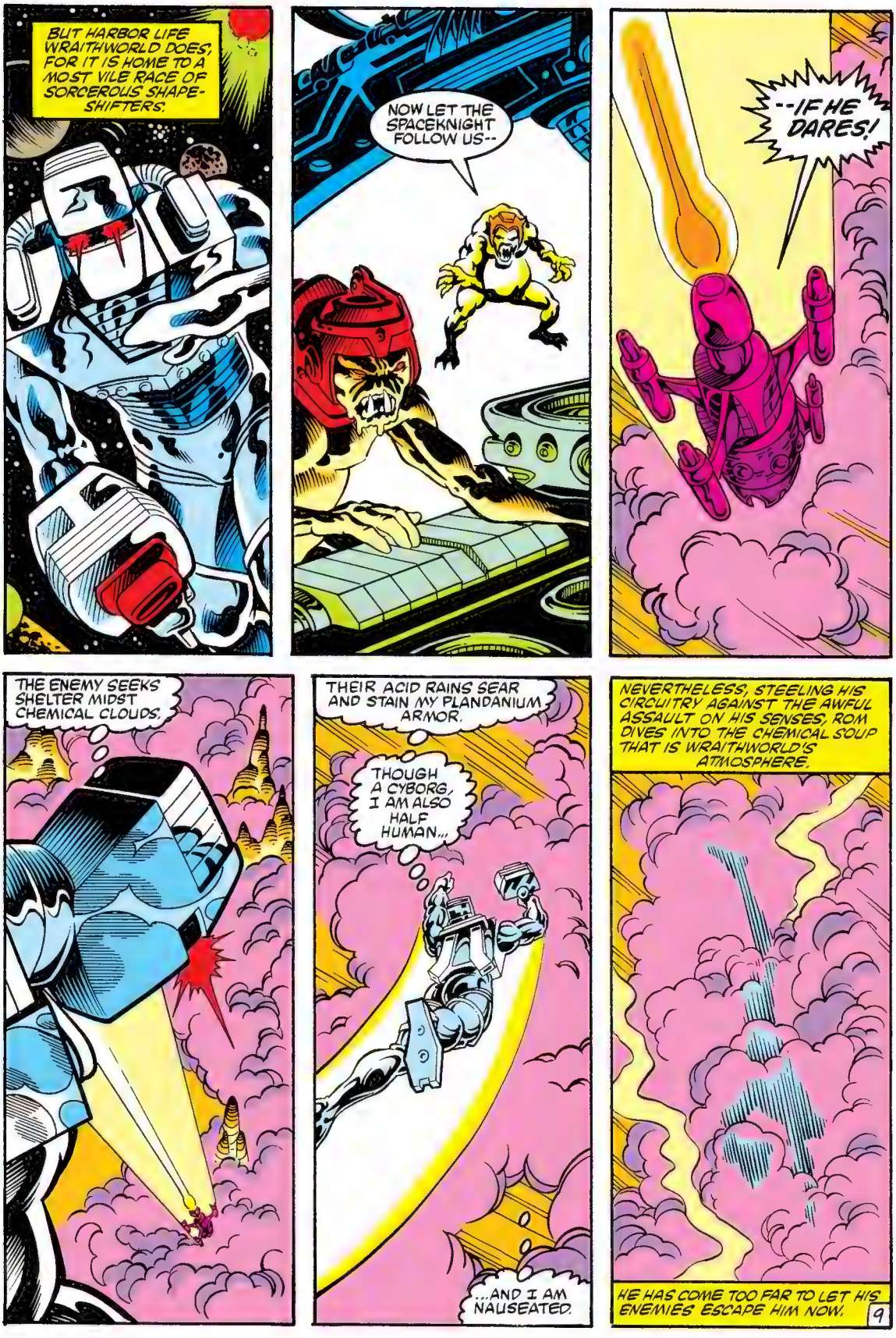

BUT, WITH ALL THEIR ATTENTION TURNED TO DEFENDING THEMSELVES...
...THE WRAITHS' SORCEROUS RESOURCES ARE DIVERTED FROM THEIR INTERGALACTIC INCANTATIONS.
THUS IS THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT, WITH HIS SLOWER STAR-DRIVE ROCKET-PODS ABLE TO GAIN ON HIS ENEMY.
HE STRIKES WITHOUT MERCY.
WRAITHS SPILL SCREAMING FROM THEIR SHATTERED SPACECRAFT...
...TO BE BANISHED TO THE NETHER DIMENSION CALLED LIMBO BEFORE DEATH CAN CLAIM THEM IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE.
SISTERS! THE SPACE-KNIGHT SOARS TOWARDS OUR COMMAND CRUISER!
BY THE DARK NEBULA, STOP HIM!
AGAIN THE OBSCENE CHANT GOES OUT...
AGAIN THE POWERS OF DARKNESS ARE CALLED UPON.
THIS CLOSE TO THE RIM OF THE DARK NEBULA--THE GALACTIC CLUSTER THAT CONTAINS THE HOME SYSTEM OF THE DIRE WRAITHS--THOSE POWERS CANNOT FAIL TO HEAR THEIR PRIESTESSES' PRAYERS...
... AND CANNOT FAIL TO RESPOND.
4

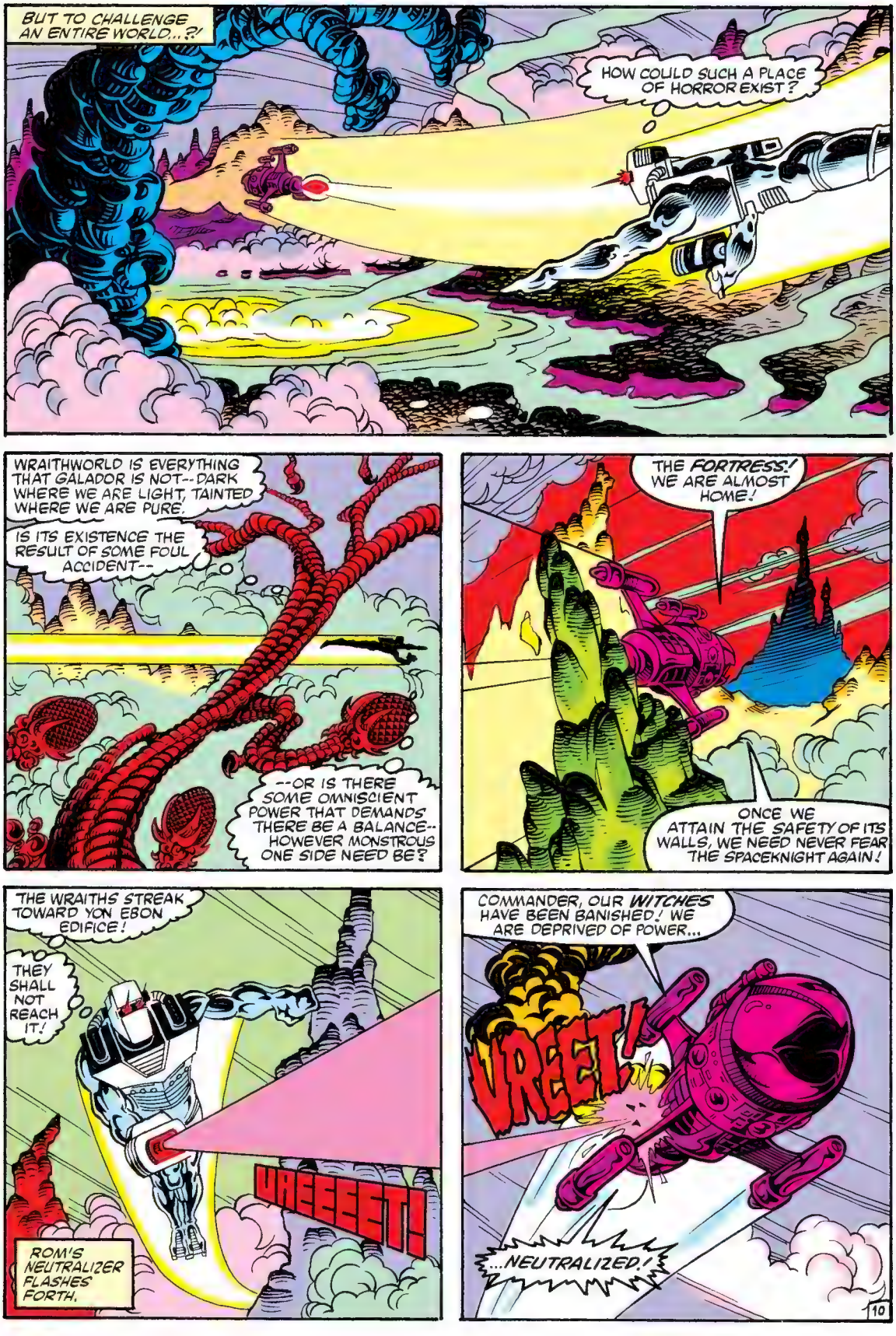

DEATHWINGS!
SOUL-STEALERS HATCHED IN FROZEN FIRE AT THE HEART OF WRAITHWORLD'S BLACK SUN.
THEIR TOUCH IS MORE FRIGID THAN THE NUMBING COLD OF SPACE ITSELF. ENVELOPED IN THEIR EBON WINGS, ROM FEELS HIS HUMANITY-GRAFTED INTO HIS SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR, CHILLED NEAR TO DEATH.
HE REACHES OUT TOWARDS THE DISTANT GLOW OF GALADOR'S GOLDEN SUN, SEEKING STRENGTH IN ITS WARMTH AS HE IS SWALLOWED IN ICY SHADOW.
THE DEATHWING NESTLINGS HAVE CONSUMED THE SPACEKNIGHT.
THE HATCHLINGS HAVE DONE--THROUGH SHEER STRENGTH OF NUMBERS--WHAT THEIR QUEEN MOTHER COULD NOT!
IT WAS OUR NEARNESS TO THE DARK NEBULA THAT GAVE THEM THE POWER!
COMMANDER!
WHAT IS IT, CLOD,-THAT YOU WOULD INTRUDE UPON OUR REJOICING?
THE DARKNESS OF THE DEATHWINGS GROWS LESS DEEP!
WHAT?! THEIR SHADOW IS ETERNAL--IMPENETRABLE!
5

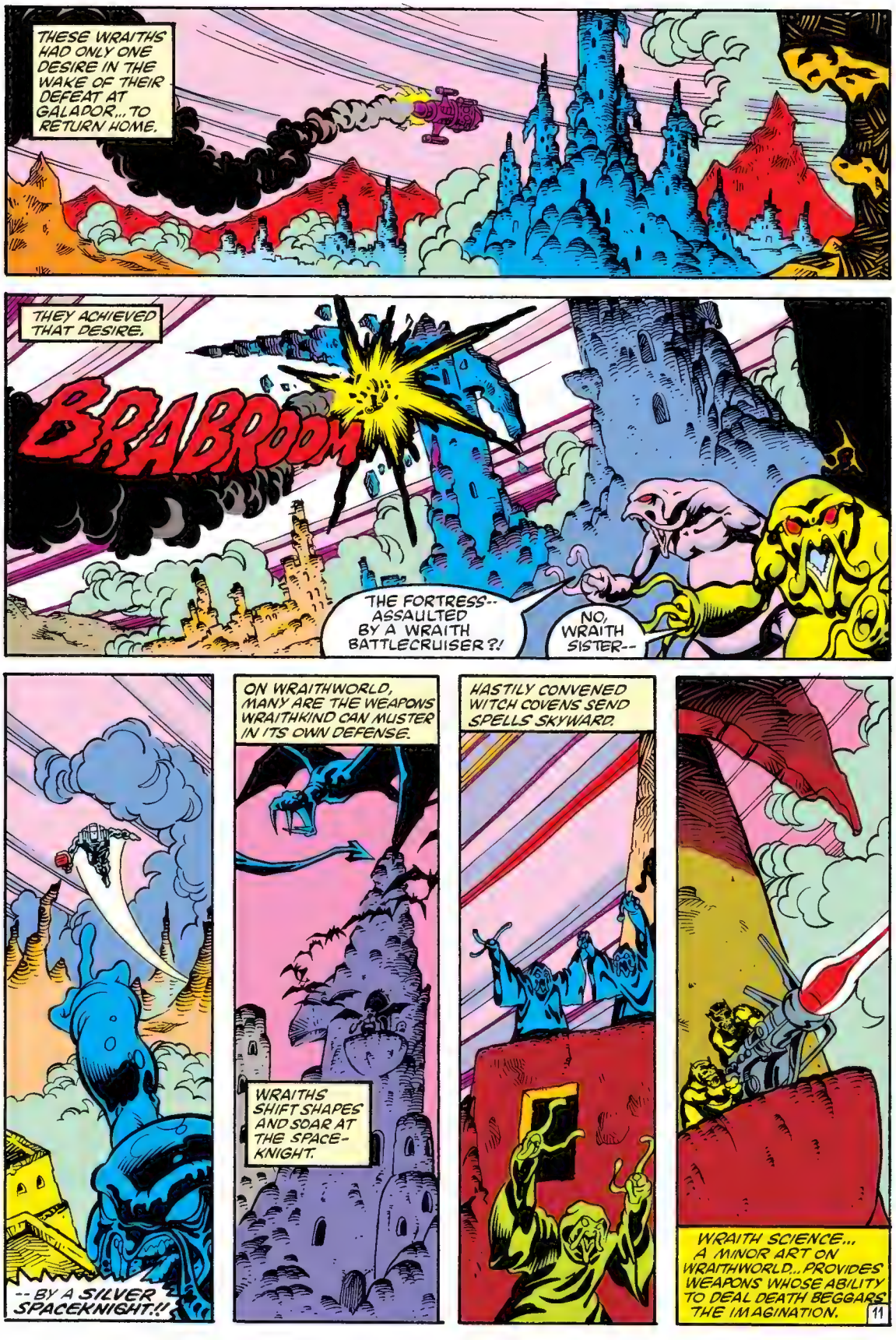

IT HAS JUST BEEN PENETRATED.
IMAGINE THE SIREN SONG OF ROM'S NEUTRALIZER, FOR YOU CANNOT HEAR IT IN SPACE.
LESS THAN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS AGO, ROM WAS FORCED TO SLAY THE DARK DEATHWING QUEEN.
IT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE HAD EVER TAKEN A LIFE... THE FIRST TIME HE HAD EVER CONCEIVED THAT HE COULD.
IT WAS WRAITHKIND THAT DROVE HIM TO THAT WHICH WAS AGAINST HIS NATURE. IT FILLED HIM WITH AN ANGER...
...ANGER THAT WOULD ONLY BE APPEASED WHEN WRAITHKIND WAS NO MORE.
COMMANDER, WHAT SHALL WE DO?!
FLEE! WE CANNOT CONFRONT THE SPACEKNIGHT!
WHY NOT LET WRAITHWORLD DEAL WITH ROM?
WRAITHWORLD? LEAD THE GALADORIAN INTO THE HEART OF THE DARK NEBULA-- TO OUR HOME PLANET ITSELF?
I WOULD BE TORTURED FOR ISSUING SUCH AN ORDER...
...BUT IF WRAITHWORLD CANNOT DEFEAT ROM, THEN I'LL NOT LIVE TO ANSWER MY SUPERIORS!
AN ORDER IS BARKED. THE WRAITH BATTLE-FLEET DISPERSES.
6

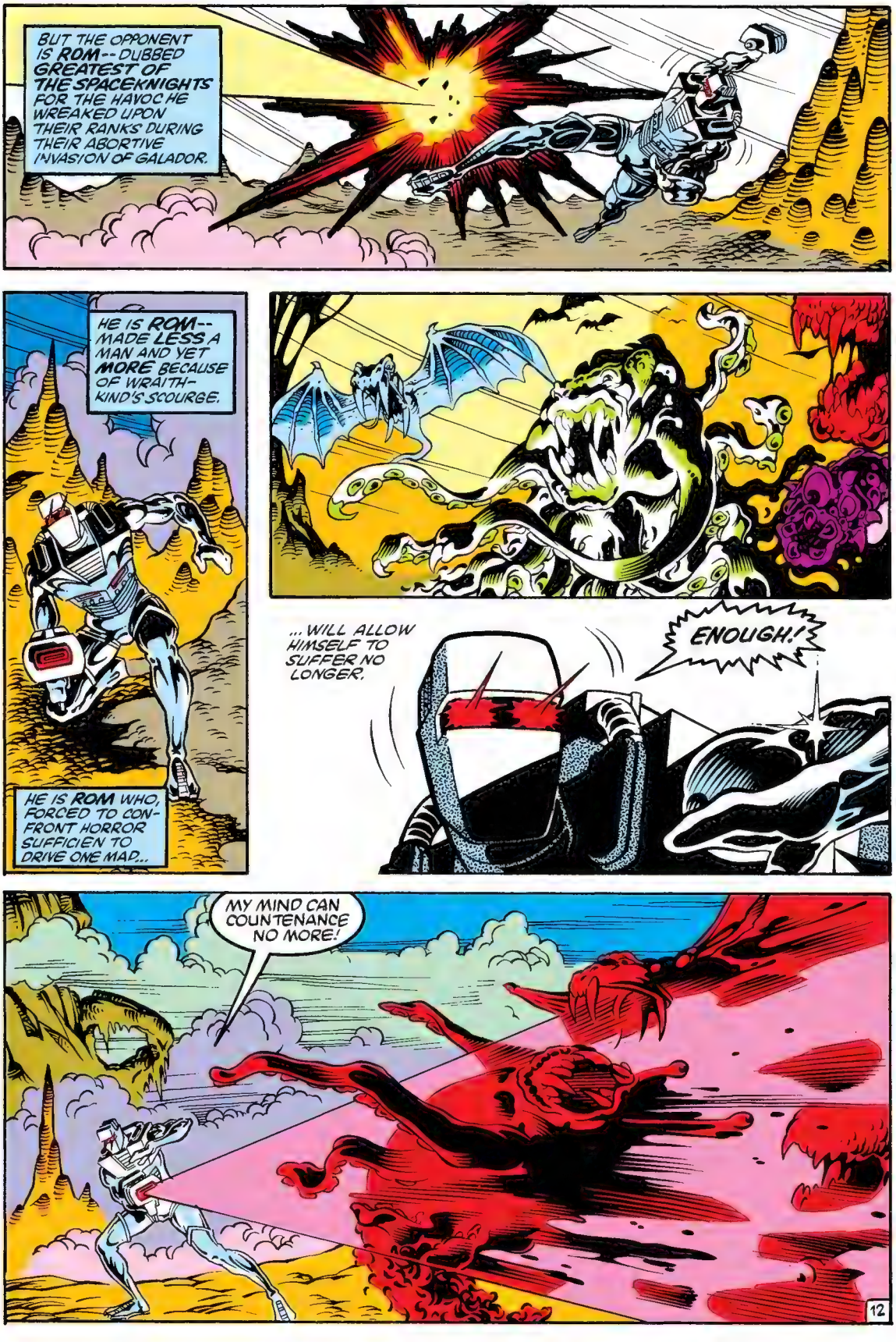

OBSERVING THIS DESPERATE MANEUVER, ROM IS FACED WITH THE MOST CRITICAL CHOICE OF HIS SHORT CAREER AS A SPACEKNIGHT. SHOULD HE PURSUE THE RECEDING FLEET IN ALL ITS DIVERSE DIRECTIONS?
OR SHOULD HE PURSUE THE WRAITH COMMAND CRUISER AS IT PLOWS THROUGH SPACE TOWARD THE DISTANT DISC OF WRAITHWORLD'S NEGATIVE SUN?
I HAVE ESTABLISHED CONTACT WITH WRAITHWORLD! OUR PEOPLE ARE PREPARING A DEFENSE CERTAIN TO DESTROY THE SPACEKNIGHT!
FOR ALL OUR SAKES WITCH, I CERTAINLY HOPE IT TURNS OUT THAT WAY?
EH? ROM IS BUT ONE BEING, THOUGH HIS HATRED OF US--
--SEEMS TO INFUSE HIM WITH THE MIGHT OF MANY!
BUT CAN YOU SERIOUSLY THINK THAT EVEN HE COULD TRIUMPH OVER ALL OF WRAITHWORLD?
YOU ARE THE ONE POSSESSED OF SORCEROUS SKILL, WITCH? WHAT DOES THE FUTURE SHOW?
DESPERATION, DEATH AND DESTRUCTION DEALT IN THE DARK LIGHT OF A BLACK SUN, AS ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, MADE HIS CHOICE AND FOLLOWED THE COMMAND CRUISER HOME...
... THUS SUBJECTING COUNTLESS OTHER WORLDS TO WRAITH INFILTRATION AS THE DISPERSING FLEET SOUGHT SHELTER ACROSS THE COSMOS.
THUS, DESTINY DENIED ROM HIS HUMANITY, AND DEFINED HIS MISSION FOR THE NEXT TWO HUNDRED YEARS.
7

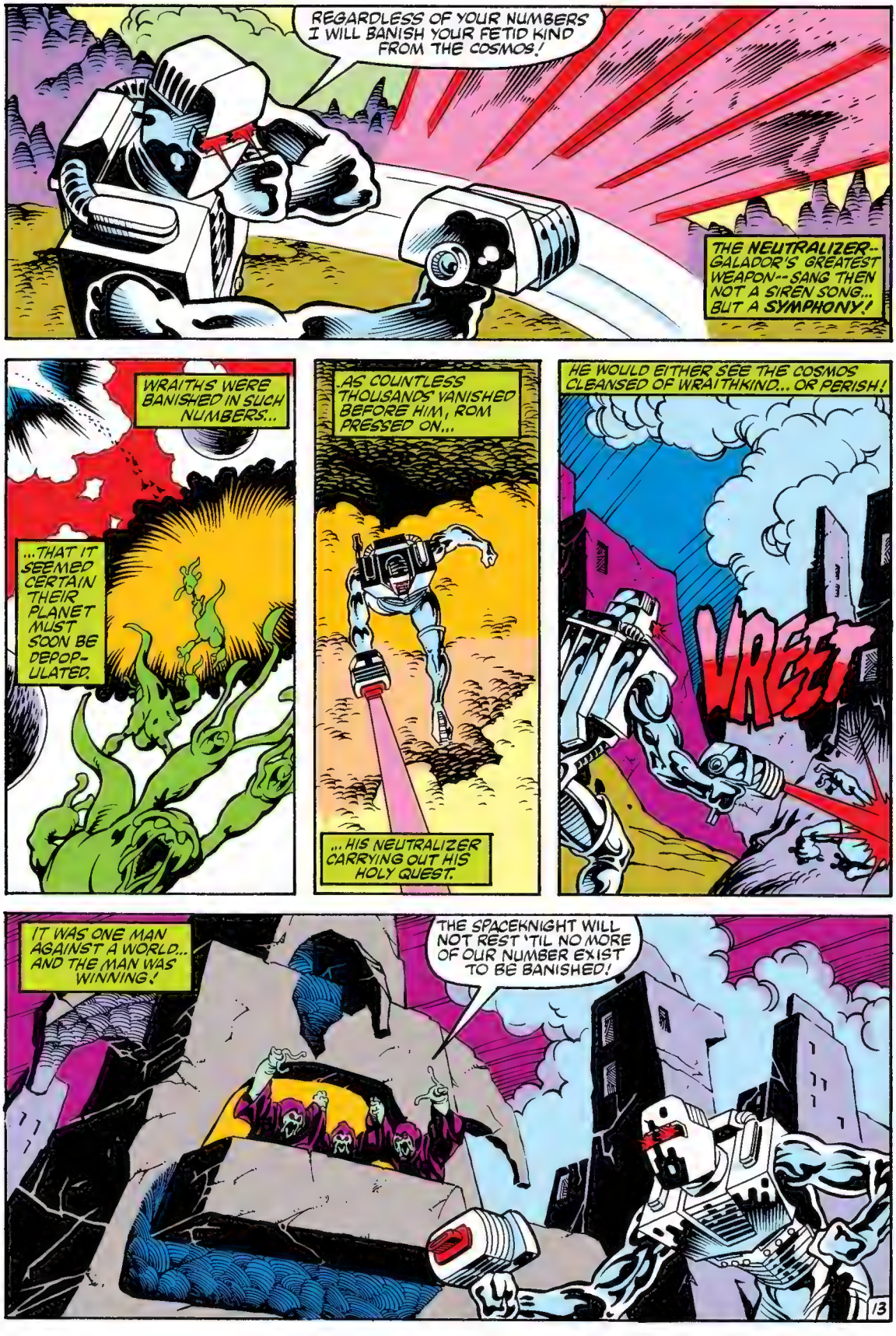

BUT DESTINY IS THE FURTHEST THOUGHT FROM THE CYBORG'S MIND AT THIS MOMENT.
ROUNDING THE RIM OF THE ENORMOUS EBON DISC, FEELING ITS COLD EVEN A MILLION MILES OUT...
...ROM GETS THE FIRST GLIMPSE ANY MAN OF HIS RACE HAS EVER HAD OF--
--WRAITHWORLD!
BLACK AND CRIMSON CLOUDS OF ASH ROIL ACROSS ITS SURFACE.
JAGGED SPEARS OF MOUNTAINS SLASH ITS CHEMICAL SKIES.
VOLCANOES SPEW THEIR POISON INTO THE ATMOSPHERE.
THAT ANY SUCH PLANET SHOULD BE CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING LIFE SEEMS TOO OBSCENE... TOO HORRIBLE TO EVEN CONSIDER.
8

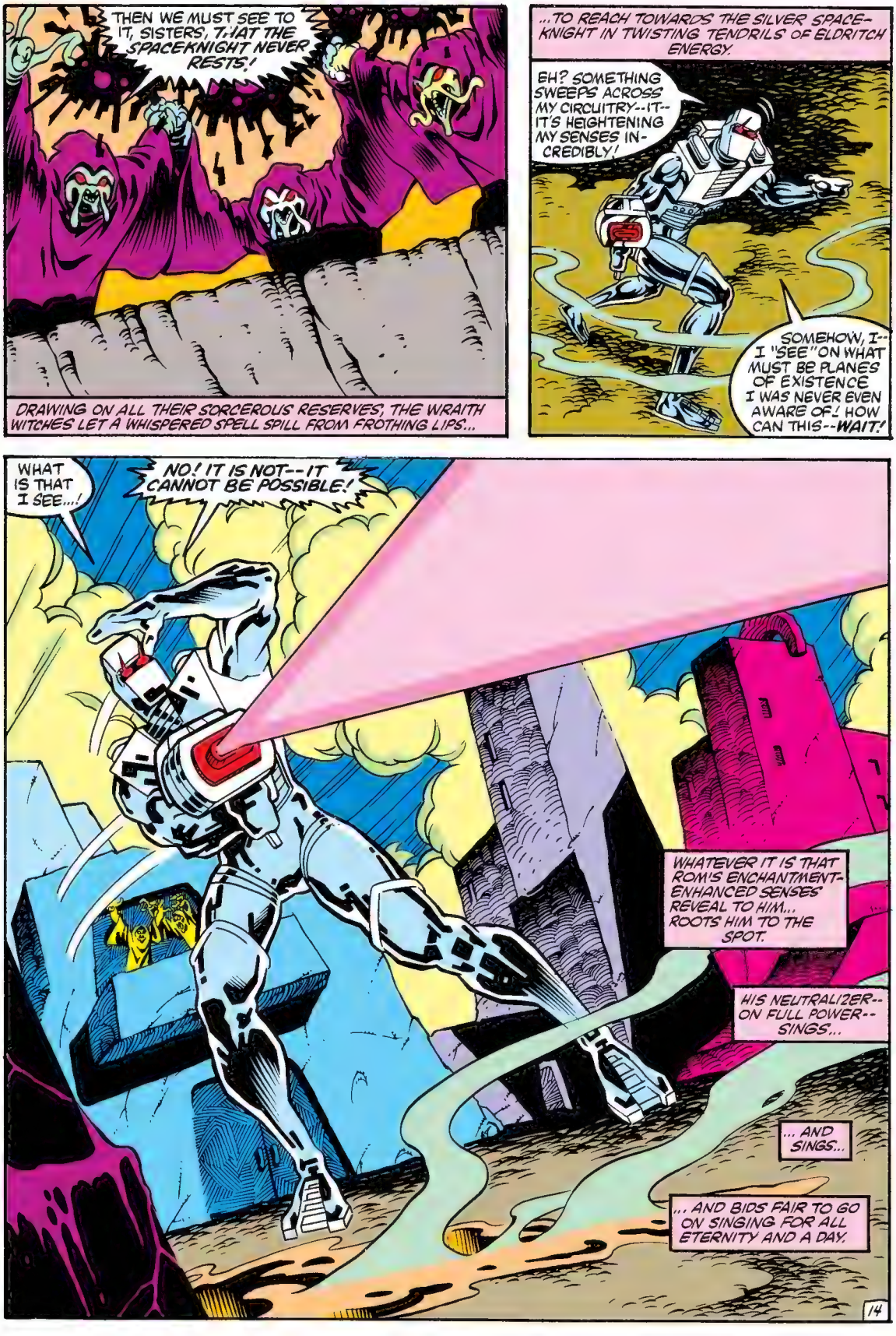

BUT HARBOR LIFE WRAITHWORLD DOES; FOR IT IS HOME TO A MOST VILE RACE OF SORCEROUS SHAPE-SHIFTERS.
NOW LET THE SPACEKNIGHT FOLLOW US--
--IF HE DARES!
THE ENEMY SEEKS SHELTER MIDST CHEMICAL CLOUDS.
THEIR ACID RAINS SEAR AND STAIN MY PLANDANIUM ARMOR.
THOUGH A CYBORG, I AM ALSO HALF HUMAN...
...AND I AM NAUSEATED.
NEVERTHELESS, STEELING HIS CIRCUITRY AGAINST THE AWFUL ASSAULT ON HIS SENSES, ROM DIVES INTO THE CHEMICAL SOUP THAT IS WRAITHWORLD'S ATMOSPHERE.
HE HAS COME TOO FAR TO LET HIS ENEMIES ESCAPE HIM NOW.
9


BUT TO CHALLENGE AN ENTIRE WORLD...?!
HOW COULD SUCH A PLACE OF HORROR EXIST?
WRAITHWORLD IS EVERYTHING THAT GALADOR IS NOT--DARK WHERE WE ARE LIGHT, TAINTED WHERE WE ARE PURE.
IS ITS EXISTENCE THE RESULT OF SOME FOUL ACCIDENT--
--OR IS THERE SOME OMNISCIENT POWER THAT DEMANDS THERE BE A BALANCE--HOWEVER MONSTROUS ONE SIDE NEED BE?
THE FORTRESS! WE ARE ALMOST HOME!
ONCE WE ATTAIN THE SAFETY OF ITS WALLS, WE NEED NEVER FEAR THE SPACEKNIGHT AGAIN!
THE WRAITHS STREAK TOWARD YON EBON EDIFICE!
THEY SHALL NOT REACH IT!
VREEEEET!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER FLASHES FORTH.
COMMANDER, OUR WITCHES HAVE BEEN BANISHED! WE ARE DEPRIVED OF POWER...
VREET!
...NEUTRALIZED!
10


THESE WRAITHS HAD ONLY ONE DESIRE IN THE WAKE OF THEIR DEFEAT AT GALADOR... TO RETURN HOME.
THEY ACHIEVED THAT DESIRE.
BRABROOM
THE FORTRESS-- ASSAULTED BY A WRAITH BATTLECRUISER?!
NO, WRAITH SISTER--
ON WRAITHWORLD, MANY ARE THE WEAPONS WRAITHKIND CAN MUSTER IN ITS OWN DEFENSE.
WRAITHS SHIFT SHAPES AND SOAR AT THE SPACE-KNIGHT.
HASTILY CONVENED WITCH COVENS SEND SPELLS SKYWARD.
-- BY A SILVER SPACEKNIGHT!!
WRAITH SCIENCE... A MINOR ART ON WRAITHWORLD... PROVIDES WEAPONS WHOSE ABILITY TO DEAL DEATH BEGGARS THE IMAGINATION.
11


BUT THE OPPONENT IS ROM -- DUBBED GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS FOR THE HAVOC HE WREAKED UPON THEIR RANKS DURING THEIR ABORTIVE INVASION OF GALADOR.
HE IS ROM -- MADE LESS A MAN AND YET MORE BECAUSE OF WRAITH-KIND'S SCOURGE.
HE IS ROM WHO, FORCED TO CONFRONT HORROR SUFFICIEN TO DRIVE ONE MAD...
... WILL ALLOW HIMSELF TO SUFFER NO LONGER.
ENOUGH!
MY MIND CAN COUNTENANCE NO MORE!
12

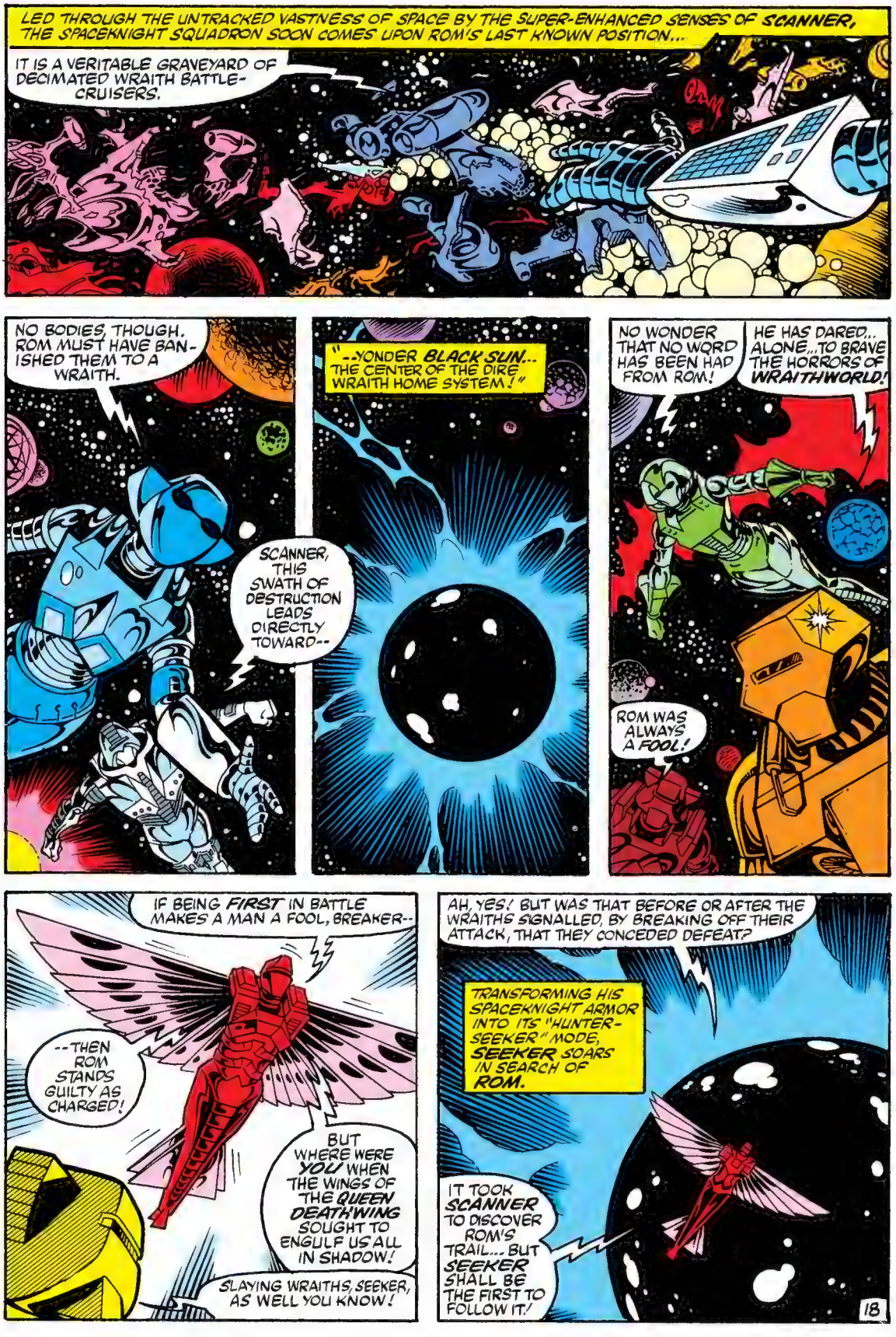

REGARDLESS OF YOUR NUMBERS I WILL BANISH YOUR FETID KIND FROM THE COSMOS!
THE NEUTRALIZER-- GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON-- SANG THEN NOT A SIREN SONG... BUT A SYMPHONY!
WRAITHS WERE BANISHED IN SUCH NUMBERS...
...THAT IT SEEMED CERTAIN THEIR PLANET MUST SOON BE DEPOPULATED.
..AS COUNTLESS THOUSANDS VANISHED BEFORE HIM, ROM PRESSED ON...
... HIS NEUTRALIZER CARRYING OUT HIS HOLY QUEST.
HE WOULD EITHER SEE THE COSMOS CLEANSED OF WRAITHKIND... OR PERISH!
VREET
IT WAS ONE MAN AGAINST A WORLD... AND THE MAN WAS WINNING!
THE SPACEKNIGHT WILL NOT REST 'TIL NO MORE OF OUR NUMBER EXIST TO BE BANISHED!
13

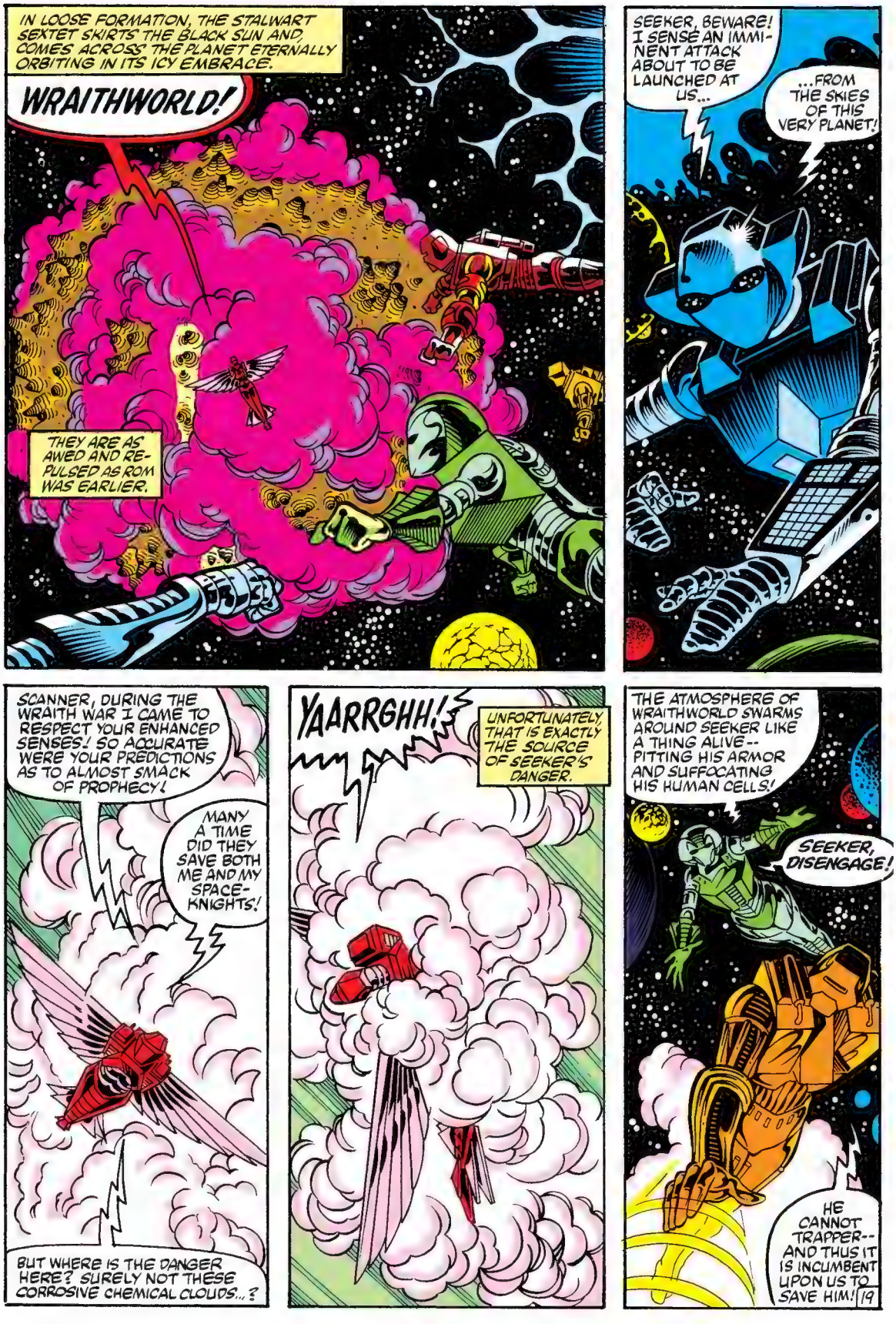

THEN WE MUST SEE TO IT, SISTERS, THAT THE SPACEKNIGHT NEVER RESTS!
DRAWING ON ALL THEIR SORCEROUS RESERVES, THE WRAITH WITCHES LET A WHISPERED SPELL SPILL FROM FROTHING LIPS...
...TO REACH TOWARDS THE SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT IN TWISTING TENDRILS OF ELDRITCH ENERGY.
EH? SOMETHING SWEEPS ACROSS MY CIRCUITRY--IT--IT'S HEIGHTENING MY SENSES IN-CREDIBLY!
SOMEHOW, I--I "SEE" ON WHAT MUST BE PLANES OF EXISTENCE I WAS NEVER EVEN AWARE OF! HOW CAN THIS--WAIT!
WHAT IS THAT I SEE...!
NO! IT IS NOT--IT CANNOT BE POSSIBLE!
WHATEVER IT IS THAT ROM'S ENCHANTMENT-ENHANCED SENSES REVEAL TO HIM... ROOTS HIM TO THE SPOT.
HIS NEUTRALIZER--ON FULL POWER--SINGS...
... AND SINGS...
... AND BIDS FAIR TO GO ON SINGING FOR ALL ETERNITY AND A DAY.
14

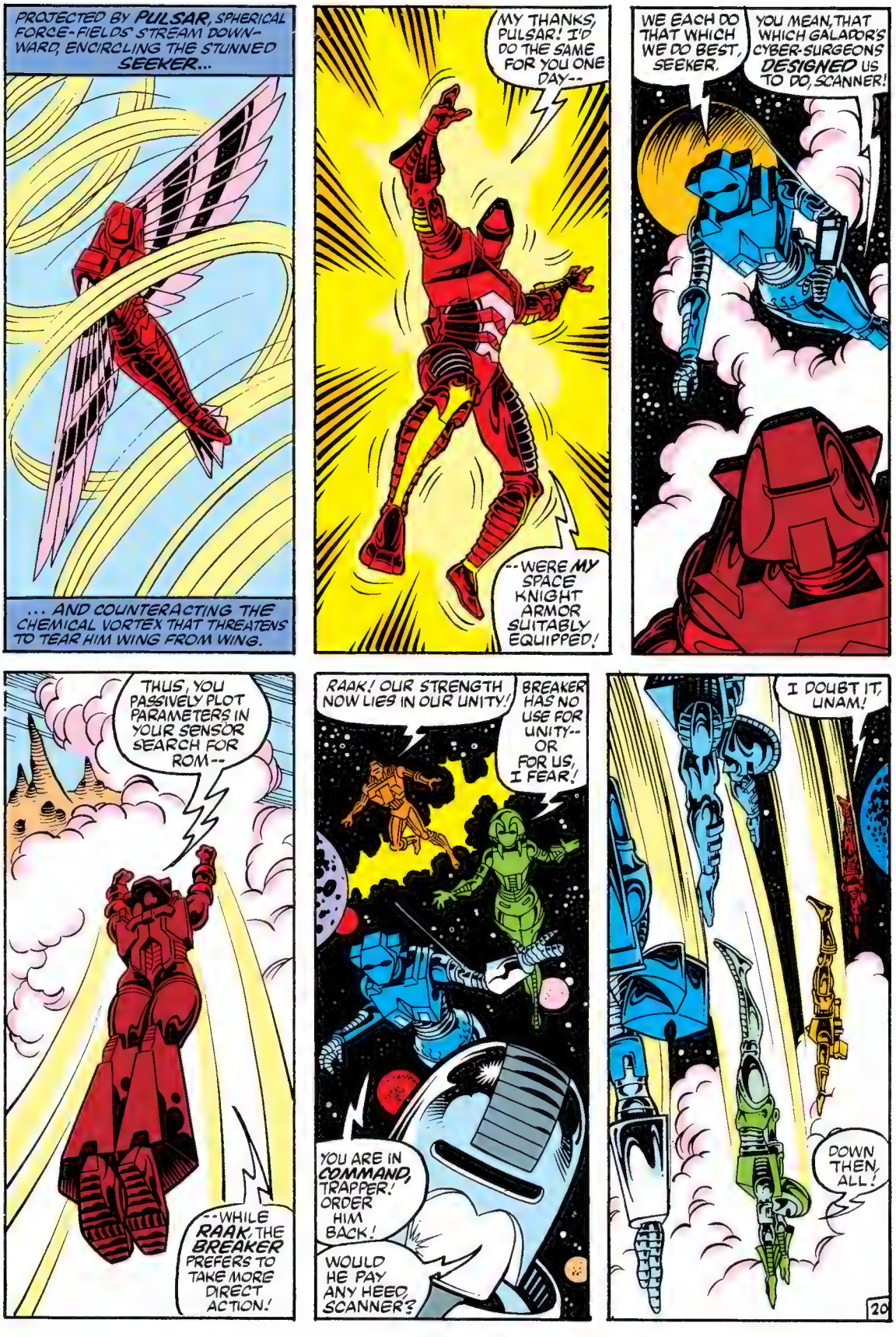
TO SAVE A SPACEKNIGHT
FEATURING THE SPACEKNIGHT SQUADRON CONCEIVED AND CREATED BY RICHARD KONKLE!
GALADOR!
I HAVE CALLED YOU ALL HERE TO THE COUNCIL TOWER, SPACEKNIGHTS, BECAUSE I AM SHAKEN UNTO MY SOUL!
HUSH! LET ALL GIVE HEED WHEN THE PRIME DIRECTOR OF GALADOR SPEAKS!
15

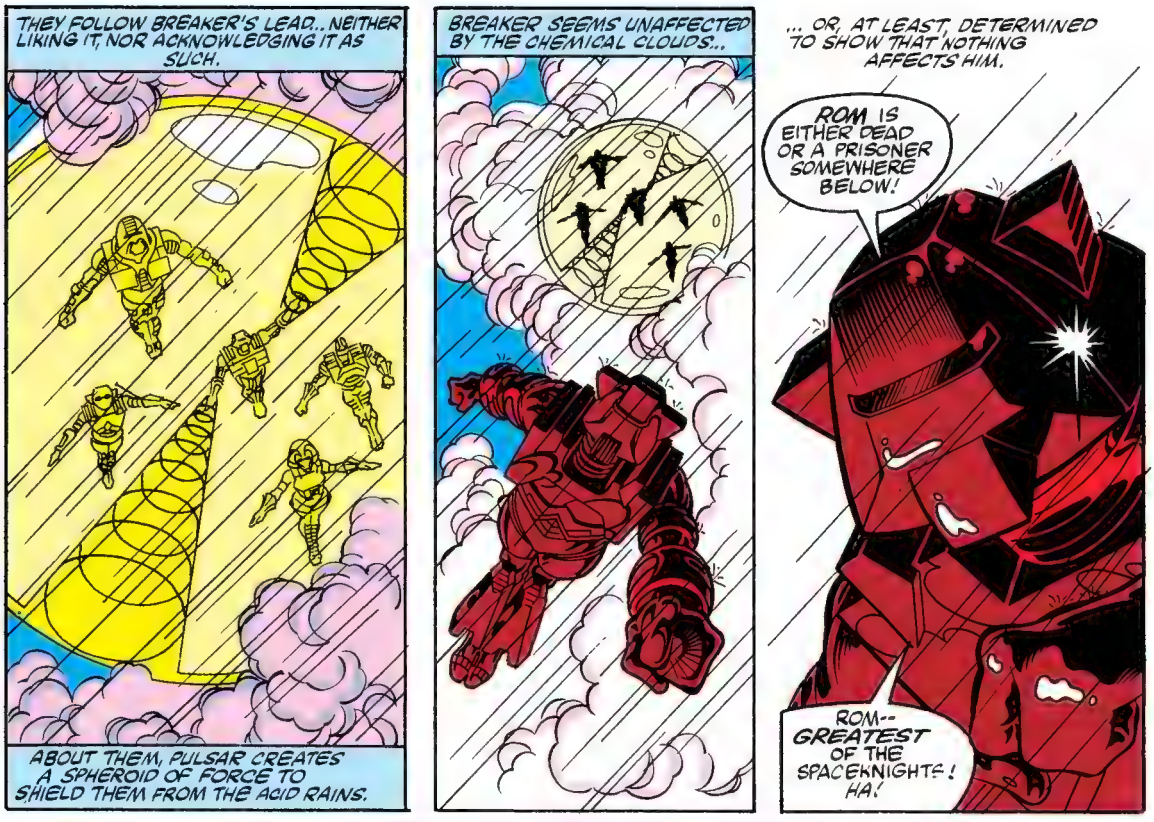
IT WAS AT THE BIDDING OF THE WHITE-HAIRED RULER OF GALADOR THAT THESE SIX SOULS SACRIFICED THEIR HUMANITY TO BECOME CYBORG COMBAT MACHINES.
IT WAS THEIR COURAGE... AND THE PRIME DIRECTOR'S UNCANNY ABILITY TO COMMAND... THAT LED TO THE ROUT OF WRAITHKIND.
THUS, WHEN THE OLD MAN SPEAKS, ALL LISTEN...
WHY AM I SCARED? THE INVASION OF GALADOR HAS BEEN STOPPED.
THANKS TO GALADOR'S ENORMOUS SACRIFICE, ALL THE RACES INHABITING THE GOLDEN GALAXY ARE SAFE AGAIN.
IT WAS ROM WHO LED US TO VICTORY-- ROM WHOM WRAITHKIND FEARED ABOVE ALL-- ROM WHO GAVE CHASE TO THEIR SCATTERED BATTLE-FLEET.
... AND, IF OUR INFORMATION IS CORRECT, ROM WHO DISPERSED THE REMAINDER OF THE WRAITH FLEET TO EVERY CORNER OF THE COSMOS!
WHY, THEN, AM I SCARED, SPACEKNIGHTS? BECAUSE SOON AFTER ENTERING THE DARK NEBULA... ROM DISAPPEARED!
IF THE DIRE WRAITHS HAVE FOUND SOME WAY TO SLAY OUR MIGHTIEST SON...!
SPACEKNIGHT SQUADRON, YOUR MISSION IS... SAVE YOUR FELLOW SPACEKNIGHT!
16

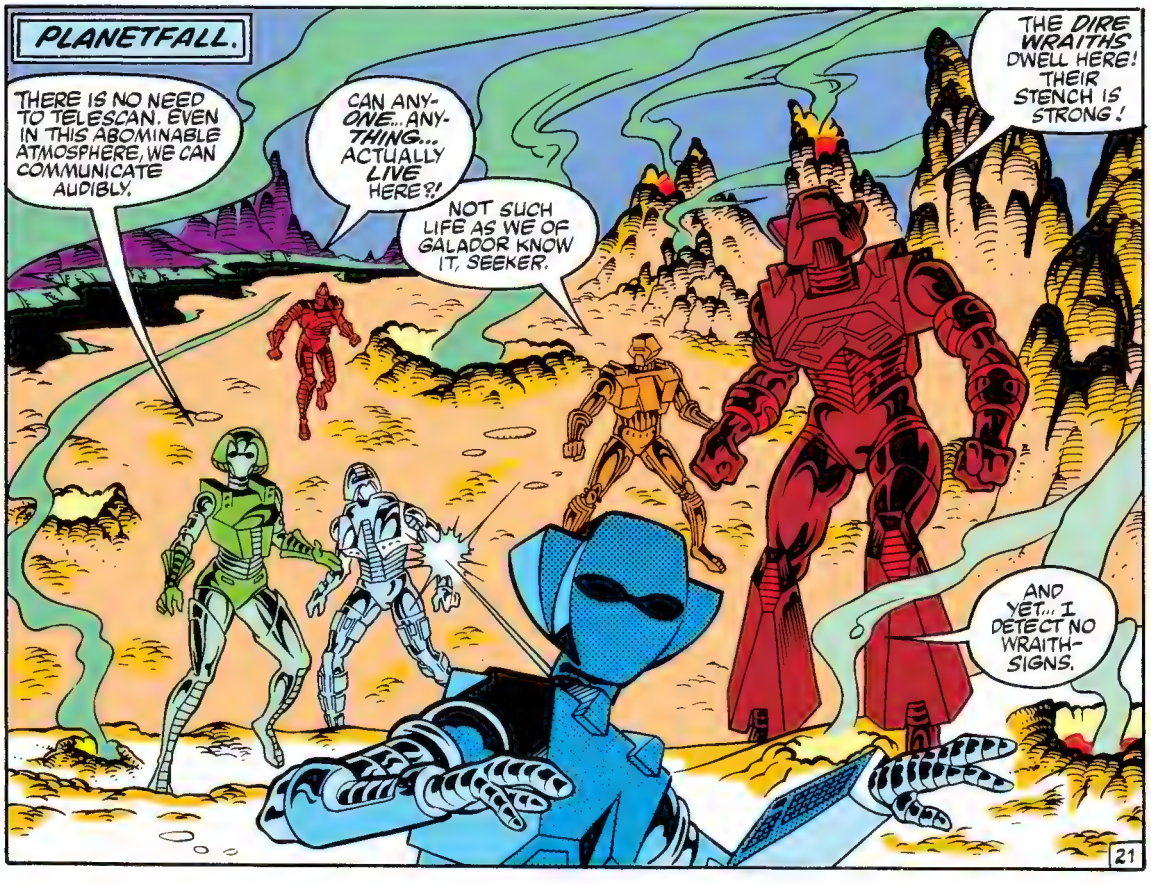
LIKE ALL SPACEKNIGHTS, THESE SIX HAD HOPED TO RECLAIM THEIR HUMANITY ONCE THE WRAITHS WERE DRIVEN FROM THE GOLDEN GALAXY. NOW... WITH THIS NEW MISSION... THEY WERE BEGINNING TO REALIZE THAT THE DISPERSAL OF WRAITHKIND MIGHT NOT HAVE SIGNALLED THE END OF THE WAR FOR...
TARM the SEEKER
PLOR the PULSAR
UNAM the UNSEEN
VOLA... TRAPPER
SKERA the SCANNER
RAAK the BREAKER
THE SPACEKNIGHT SQUADRON
17


LED THROUGH THE UNTRACKED VASTNESS OF SPACE BY THE SUPER-ENHANCED SENSES OF SCANNER, THE SPACEKNIGHT SQUADRON SOON COMES UPON ROM'S LAST KNOWN POSITION...
IT IS A VERITABLE GRAVEYARD OF DECIMATED WRAITH BATTLE-CRUISERS.
KRAK
NO BODIES, THOUGH. ROM MUST HAVE BANISHED THEM TO A WRAITH.
SCANNER, THIS SWATH OF DESTRUCTION LEADS DIRECTLY TOWARD--
"--YONDER BLACK SUN... THE CENTER OF THE DIRE WRAITH HOME SYSTEM!"
NO WONDER THAT NO WORD HAS BEEN HAD FROM ROM!
HE HAS DARED... ALONE...TO BRAVE THE HORRORS OF WRAITHWORLD!
ROM WAS ALWAYS A FOOL!
IF BEING FIRST IN BATTLE MAKES A MAN A FOOL, BREAKER--
--THEN ROM STANDS GUILTY AS CHARGED!
BUT WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE WINGS OF THE QUEEN DEATHWING SOUGHT TO ENGULF US ALL IN SHADOW!
SLAYING WRAITHS, SEEKER, AS WELL YOU KNOW!
AH, YES! BUT WAS THAT BEFORE OR AFTER THE WRAITHS SIGNALLED, BY BREAKING OFF THEIR ATTACK, THAT THEY CONCEDED DEFEAT?
TRANSFORMING HIS SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR INTO ITS "HUNTER-SEEKER" MODE, SEEKER SOARS IN SEARCH OF ROM.
IT TOOK SCANNER TO DISCOVER ROM'S TRAIL... BUT SEEKER SHALL BE THE FIRST TO FOLLOW IT!
18


IN LOOSE FORMATION, THE STALWART SEXTET SKIRTS THE BLACK SUN AND, COMES ACROSS THE PLANET ETERNALLY ORBITING IN ITS ICY EMBRACE.
WRAITHWORLD!
THEY ARE AS AWED AND REPULSED AS ROM WAS EARLIER.
SEEKER, BEWARE! I SENSE AN IMMINENT ATTACK ABOUT TO BE LAUNCHED AT US...
...FROM THE SKIES OF THIS VERY PLANET!
SCANNER, DURING THE WRAITH WAR I CAME TO RESPECT YOUR ENHANCED SENSES! SO ACCURATE WERE YOUR PREDICTIONS AS TO ALMOST SMACK OF PROPHECY!
MANY A TIME DID THEY SAVE BOTH ME AND MY SPACE-KNIGHTS!
BUT WHERE IS THE DANGER HERE? SURELY NOT THESE CORROSIVE CHEMICAL CLOUDS...?
YAARRGHH!
UNFORTUNATELY, THAT IS EXACTLY THE SOURCE OF SEEKER'S DANGER.
THE ATMOSPHERE OF WRAITHWORLD SWARMS AROUND SEEKER LIKE A THING ALIVE-- PITTING HIS ARMOR AND SUFFOCATING HIS HUMAN CELLS!
SEEKER, DISENGAGE!
HE CANNOT TRAPPER-- AND THUS IT IS INCUMBENT UPON US TO SAVE HIM!
19

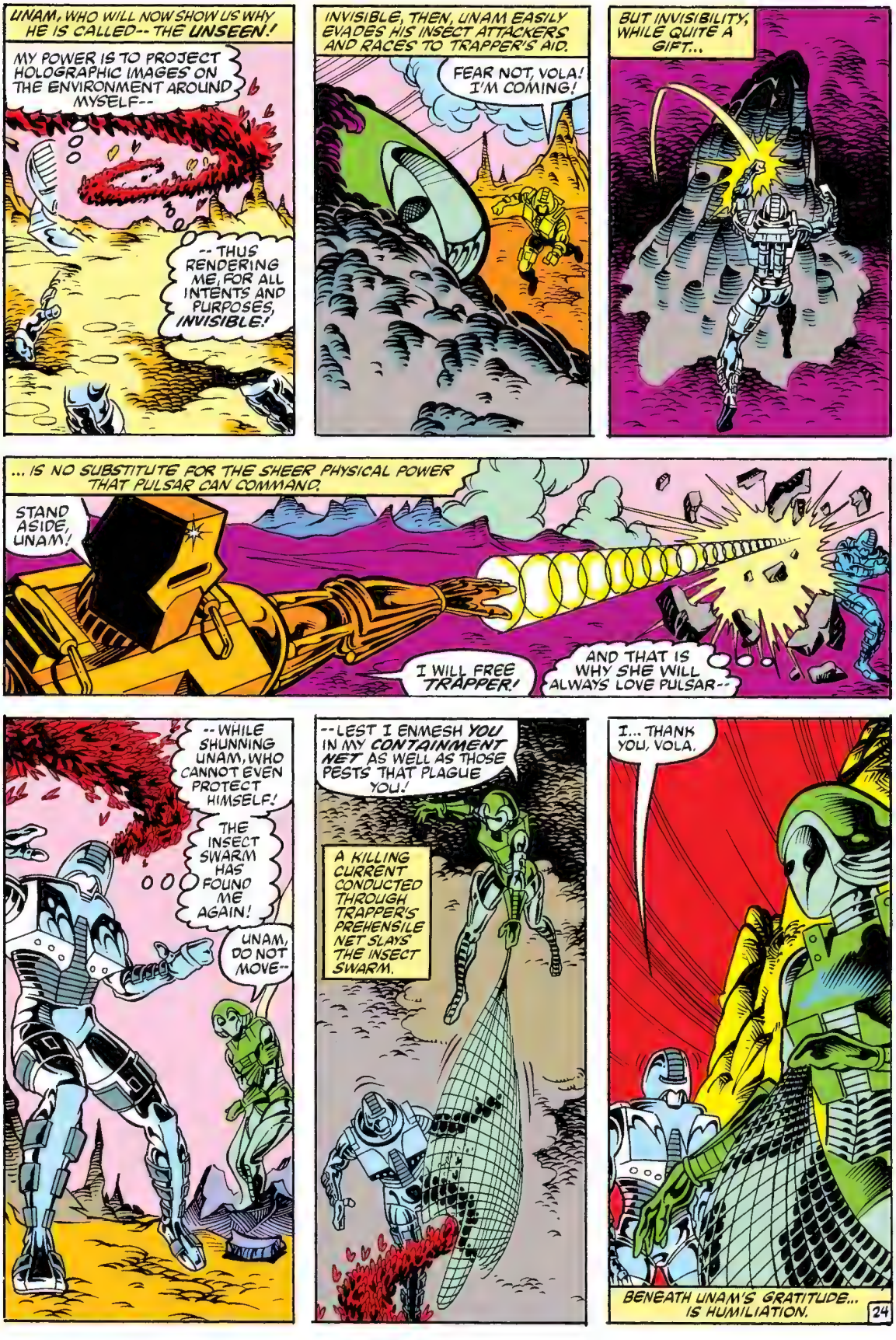

PROJECTED BY PULSAR, SPHERICAL FORCE-FIELDS STREAM DOWNWARD, ENCIRCLING THE STUNNED SEEKER...
... AND COUNTERACTING THE CHEMICAL VORTEX THAT THREATENS TO TEAR HIM WING FROM WING.
MY THANKS, PULSAR! I'D DO THE SAME FOR YOU ONE DAY--
--WERE MY SPACE KNIGHT ARMOR SUITABLY EQUIPPED!
WE EACH DO THAT WHICH WE DO BEST, SEEKER.
YOU MEAN, THAT WHICH GALADOR'S CYBER-SURGEONS DESIGNED US TO DO, SCANNER!
THUS, YOU PASSIVELY PLOT PARAMETERS IN YOUR SENSOR SEARCH FOR ROM--
--WHILE RAAK, THE BREAKER PREFERS TO TAKE MORE DIRECT ACTION!
RAAK! OUR STRENGTH NOW LIES IN OUR UNITY!
BREAKER HAS NO USE FOR UNITY-- OR FOR US, I FEAR!
YOU ARE IN COMMAND, TRAPPER! ORDER HIM BACK!
WOULD HE PAY ANY HEED, SCANNER?
I DOUBT IT, UNAM!
DOWN THEN, ALL!
20

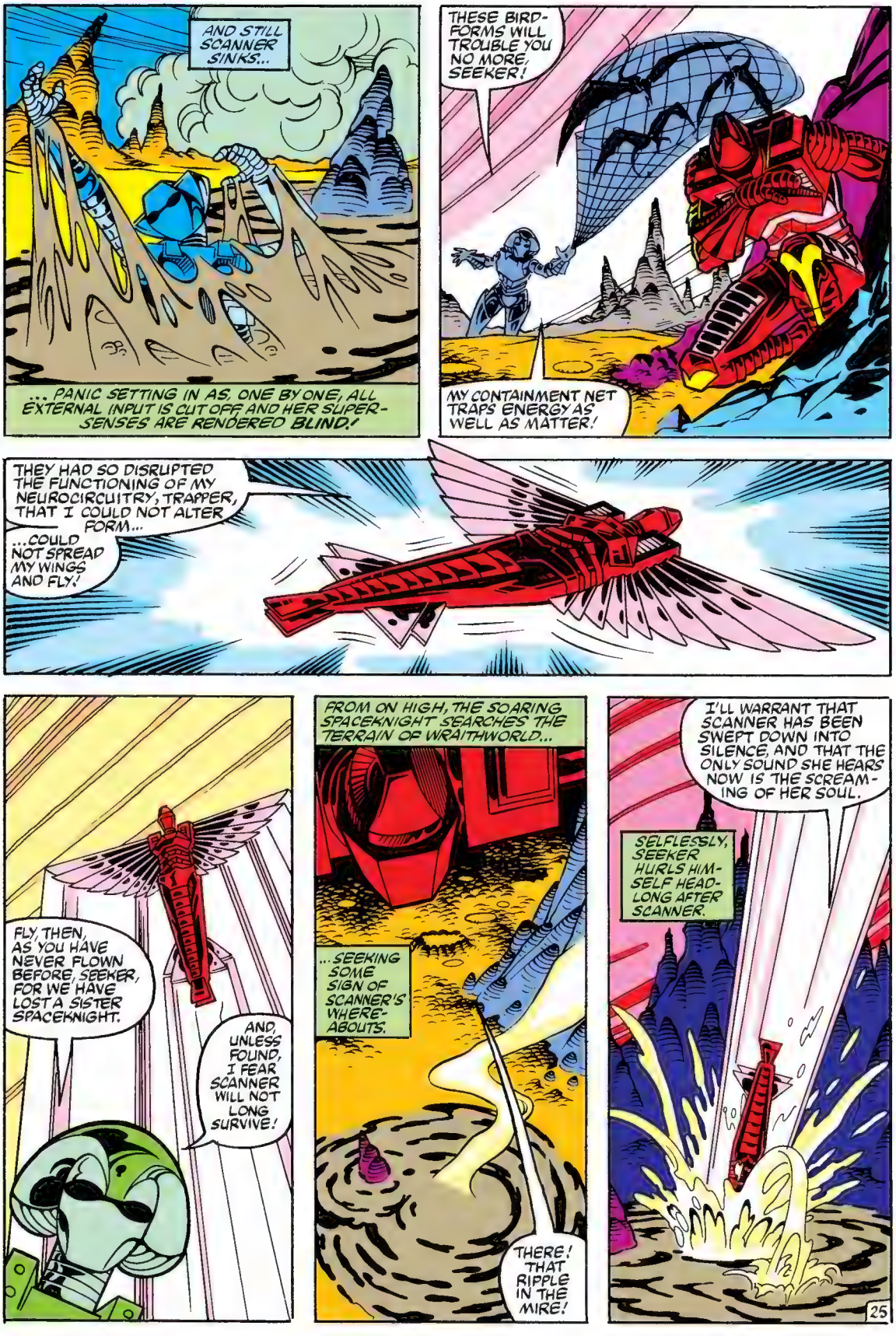

THEY FOLLOW BREAKER'S LEAD... NEITHER LIKING IT, NOR ACKNOWLEDGING IT AS SUCH.
ABOUT THEM, PULSAR CREATES A SPHEROID OF FORCE TO SHIELD THEM FROM THE ACID RAINS.
BREAKER SEEMS UNAFFECTED BY THE CHEMICAL CLOUDS...
... OR, AT LEAST, DETERMINED TO SHOW THAT NOTHING AFFECTS HIM.
ROM IS EITHER DEAD OR A PRISONER SOMEWHERE BELOW!
ROM-- GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS! HA!


PLANETFALL.
THERE IS NO NEED TO TELESCAN. EVEN IN THIS ABOMINABLE ATMOSPHERE, WE CAN COMMUNICATE AUDIBLY.
CAN ANY-ONE... ANY-THING... ACTUALLY LIVE HERE?!
NOT SUCH LIFE AS WE OF GALADOR KNOW IT, SEEKER.
THE DIRE WRAITHS DWELL HERE! THEIR STENCH IS STRONG!
AND YET... I DETECT NO WRAITH-SIGNS.
21

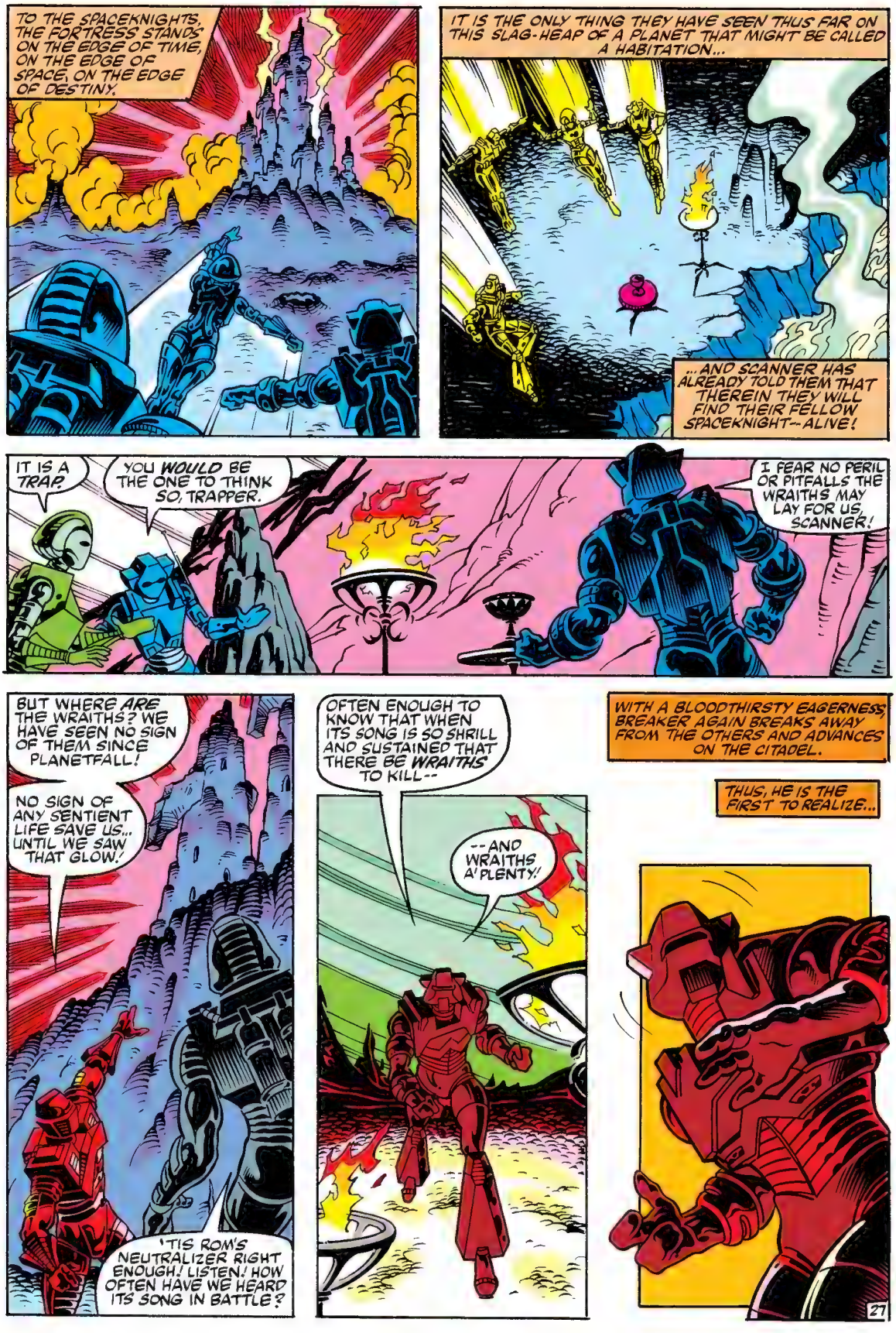
THE WRAITHS MUST BE HERE, SCANNER! THIS IS THEIR HOMEWORLD! WHERE ELSE WOULD THEY BE?
PERHAPS THEY HAVE FOUND SOME WAY TO JAM YOUR MUCH-VAUNTED SUPER-SENSES!
WHAT--?!
WE ARE ATTACKED, SQUADRON... ON MANY FRONTS AT ONCE!
THE GROUND HEAVES UP TO ENCLOSE BREAKER! BLACK ASH ENCASES TRAPPER! ACID-DRIPPING INSECTS SEEK TO STING ME WITH POISONED BARBS!
UNAM'S CRY GOES UNHEEDED...
... SIMPLY BECAUSE HIS FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS HAVE PROBLEMS OF THEIR OWN.
WOLF-THINGS-- LEAPING AT ME!
WRAITHWORLD PRECURSORS OF THE HELLHOUNDS OF THE DARK NEBULA!
AVIAN ENERGY SWARMS AROUND ME-- SLASHING AT ME WITH WINGS OF NIGHT!
AND THE SURFACE OF WRAITH-WORLD SEEKS TO SWALLOW SCANNER!
22

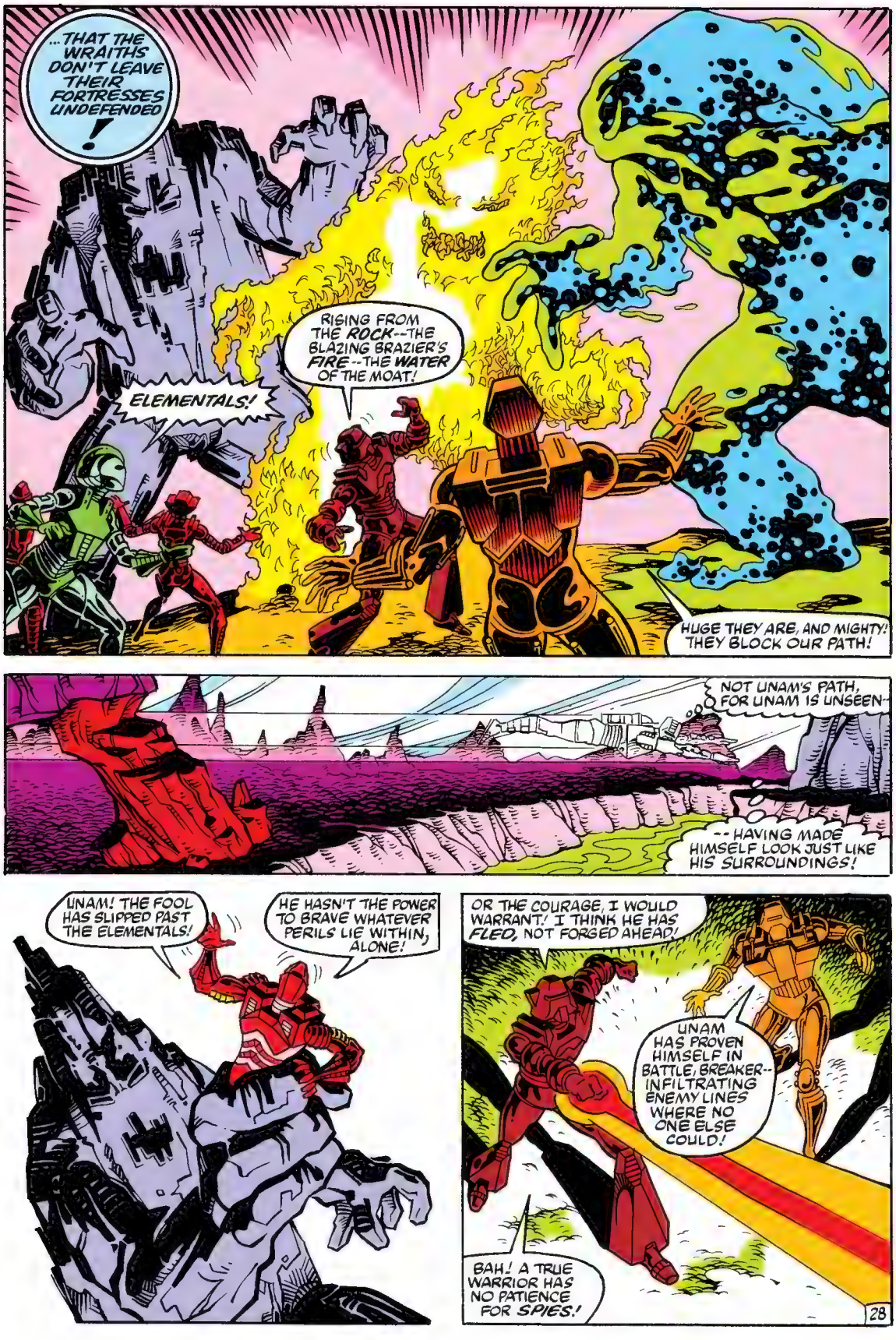
RAAK... CALLED THE BREAKER... IS A MASTER OF MICROWAVE RADIATION.
EMMITTING THOSE MICROWAVES IN A STEADY, CONTROLLED SERIES, HE CAN HEAT MATTER TO INCREDIBLE TEMPERATURES...
...AND THUS MELT FREE FROM THE ROCK OF WRAITHWORLD!
CAN EVEN THE MIGHTY ROM DO THIS??!
PULSAR EMITS ENERGY IN ANOTHER FORM... STEADILY PULSING FIELDS OF FORCE, WHICH ARE CAPABLE OF TAKING OUT EVEN THE MOST PERSISTENT ENEMY.
THERE IS ONE FURTHER THING YOU NEED TO BE TOLD ABOUT PLOR, CALLED PULSAR.
BEFORE HE BECAME A SPACEKNIGHT HE LOVED A WOMAN... VOLA... SHE WHO IS NOW CALLED TRAPPER.
AS DID UNAM, SINCE VOLA WAS SO VERY BEAUTIFUL.
23


UNAM, WHO WILL NOW SHOW US WHY HE IS CALLED-- THE UNSEEN!
MY POWER IS TO PROJECT HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGES ON THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND MYSELF--
-- THUS RENDERING ME, FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, INVISIBLE!
INVISIBLE, THEN, UNAM EASILY EVADES HIS INSECT ATTACKERS AND RACES TO TRAPPER'S AID.
FEAR NOT, VOLA! I'M COMING!
BUT INVISIBILITY, WHILE QUITE A GIFT...
... IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE SHEER PHYSICAL POWER THAT PULSAR CAN COMMAND.
STAND ASIDE, UNAM!
I WILL FREE TRAPPER!
AND THAT IS WHY SHE WILL ALWAYS LOVE PULSAR--
-- WHILE SHUNNING UNAM, WHO CANNOT EVEN PROTECT HIMSELF!
THE INSECT SWARM HAS FOUND ME AGAIN!
UNAM, DO NOT MOVE--
--LEST I ENMESH YOU IN MY CONTAINMENT NET AS WELL AS THOSE PESTS THAT PLAGUE YOU!
A KILLING CURRENT CONDUCTED THROUGH TRAPPER'S PREHENSILE NET SLAYS THE INSECT SWARM.
I... THANK YOU, VOLA.
BENEATH UNAM'S GRATITUDE... IS HUMILIATION.
24

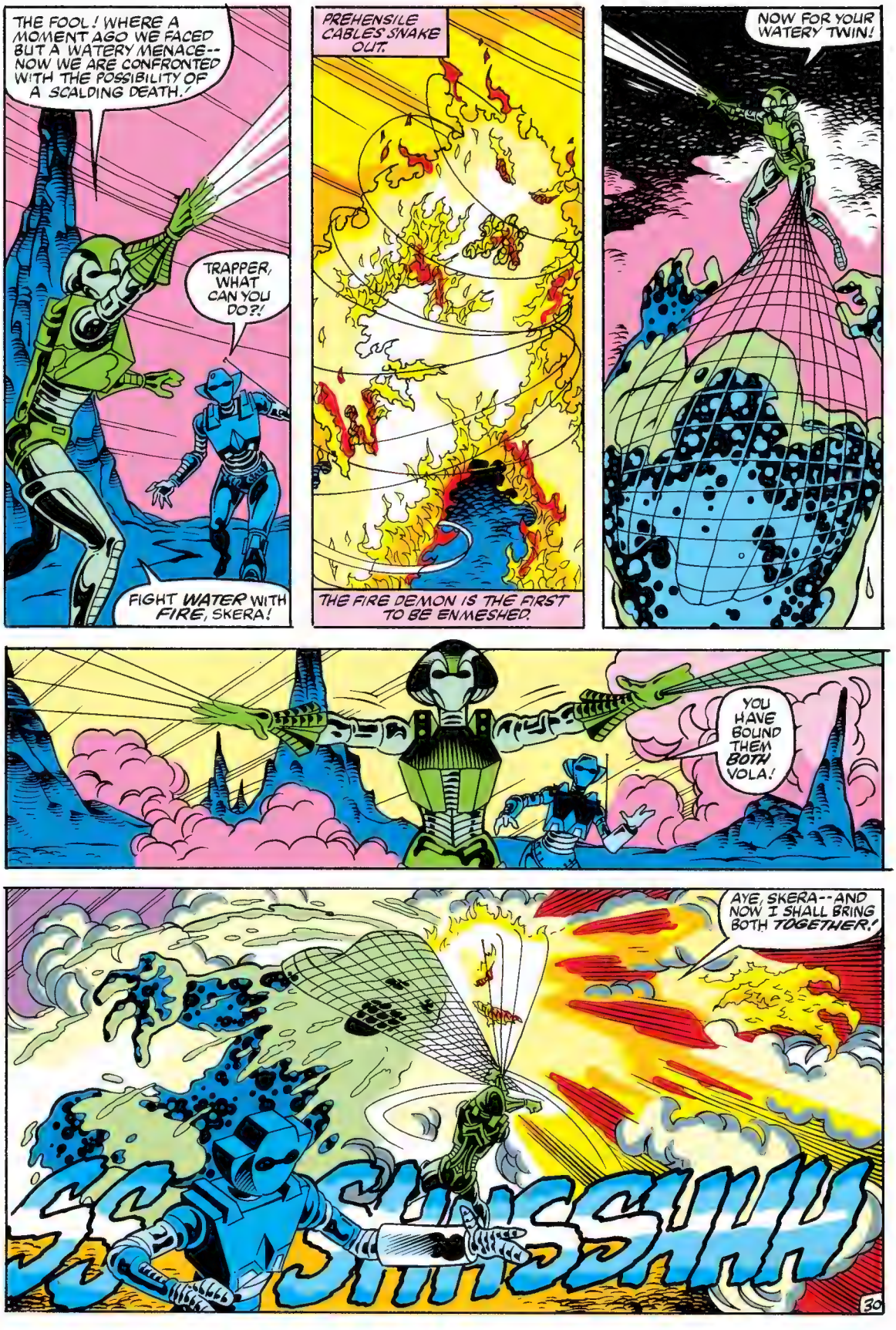

AND STILL SCANNER SINKS...
... PANIC SETTING IN AS, ONE BY ONE, ALL EXTERNAL INPUT IS CUT OFF AND HER SUPER-SENSES ARE RENDERED BLIND!
THESE BIRD-FORMS WILL TROUBLE YOU NO MORE, SEEKER!
MY CONTAINMENT NET TRAPS ENERGY AS WELL AS MATTER!
THEY HAD SO DISRUPTED THE FUNCTIONING OF MY NEUROCIRCUITRY, TRAPPER, THAT I COULD NOT ALTER FORM...
...COULD NOT SPREAD MY WINGS AND FLY!
FLY, THEN, AS YOU HAVE NEVER FLOWN BEFORE, SEEKER, FOR WE HAVE LOST A SISTER SPACEKNIGHT.
AND, UNLESS FOUND, I FEAR SCANNER WILL NOT LONG SURVIVE!
FROM ON HIGH, THE SOARING SPACEKNIGHT SEARCHES THE TERRAIN OF WRAITHWORLD...
...SEEKING SOME SIGN OF SCANNER'S WHEREABOUTS.
THERE! THAT RIPPLE IN THE MIRE!
I'LL WARRANT THAT SCANNER HAS BEEN SWEPT DOWN INTO SILENCE, AND THAT THE ONLY SOUND SHE HEARS NOW IS THE SCREAMING OF HER SOUL.
SELFLESSLY, SEEKER HURLS HIMSELF HEADLONG AFTER SCANNER.
25

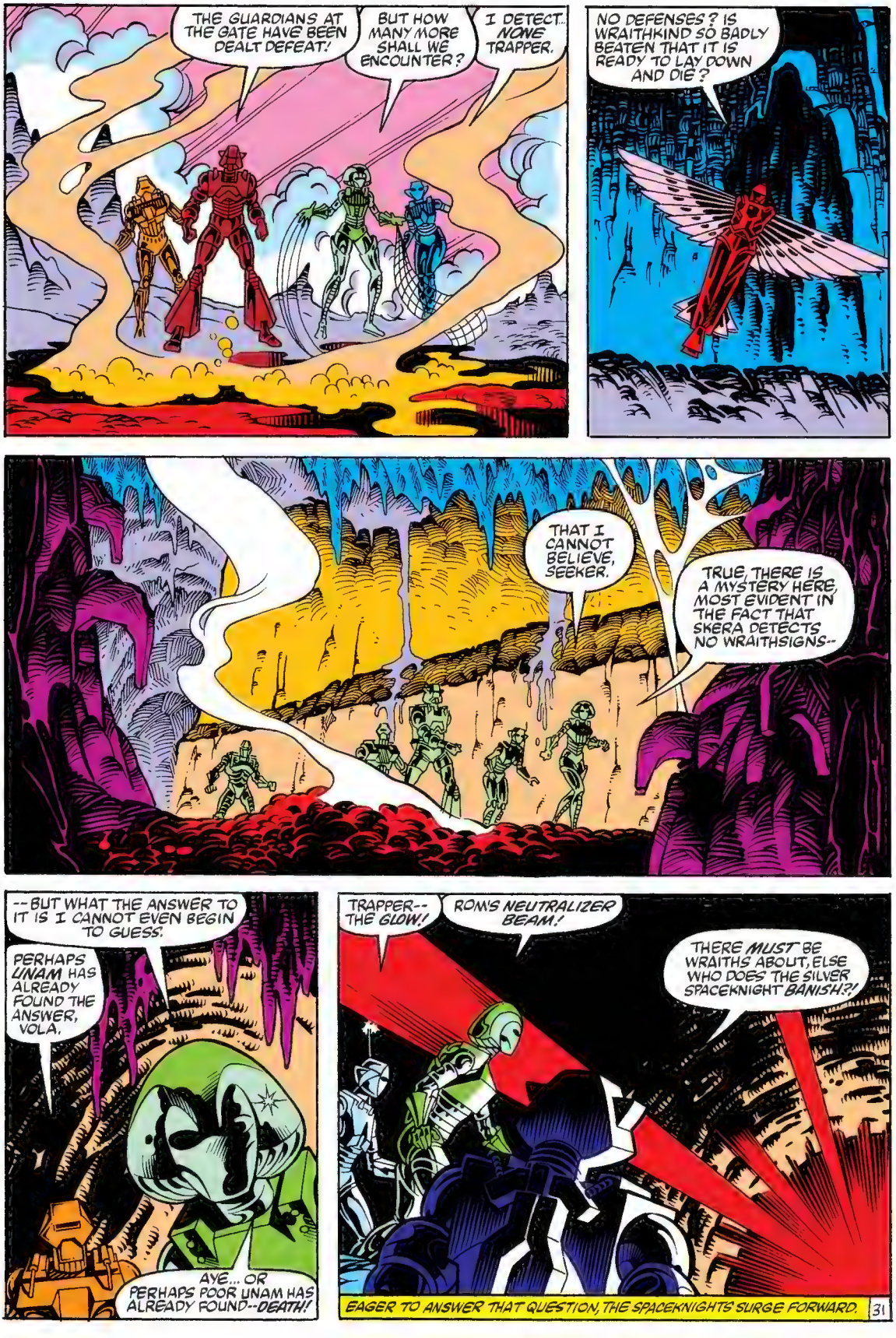
FOR LONG, TERRIBLE MOMENTS THERE IS ONLY... SILENCE.
THEN THE STINKING SURFACE OF WRAITHWORLD HEAVES...
... DISGORGING THOSE WHOM IT COULD NOT CONSUME.
WAS IT VERY AWFUL, SCANNER?
IT...WAS, SEEKER--AS IT MUST HAVE BEEN FOR YOU.
TRUE. THOUGH YOU ARE THE MORE SENSITIVE, OUR POWERS ARE SIMILAR.
WHAT COULD BE MOVE NATURAL... FOR BROTHER AND SISTER?
SCANNER, NOW THAT YOUR SENSES ARE FREE AGAIN--
--TELL US WHAT TRANSPIRES ON THE HORIZON!
VISUALLY, I SEE WHAT YOU SEE, SEEKER-- A CITADEL WHOSE JAGGED SPIRES PIERCE THE CLOUDS.
IN THAT CITY STANDS A SOLITARY LIFEFORM, AND FROM THAT LIFEFORM EMITS A UNIQUE AND AWESOME ENERGY...
'TIS THE NEUTRALIZER OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
THEN HE WHOM WE SEEK STANDS IN YON FORTRESS! FORWARD, SPACEKNIGHTS, ALL!
26


TO THE SPACEKNIGHTS, THE FORTRESS STANDS ON THE EDGE OF TIME, ON THE EDGE OF SPACE, ON THE EDGE OF DESTINY.
IT IS THE ONLY THING THEY HAVE SEEN THUS FAR ON THIS SLAG-HEAP OF A PLANET THAT MIGHT BE CALLED A HABITATION...
...AND SCANNER HAS ALREADY TOLD THEM THAT THEREIN THEY WILL FIND THEIR FELLOW SPACEKNIGHT--ALIVE!
IT IS A TRAP.
YOU WOULD BE THE ONE TO THINK SO, TRAPPER.
I FEAR NO PERIL OR PITFALLS THE WRAITHS MAY LAY FOR US, SCANNER!
BUT WHERE ARE THE WRAITHS? WE HAVE SEEN NO SIGN OF THEM SINCE PLANETFALL!
NO SIGN OF ANY SENTIENT LIFE SAVE US... UNTIL WE SAW THAT GLOW.
'TIS ROM'S NEUTRALIZER RIGHT ENOUGH! LISTEN! HOW OFTEN HAVE WE HEARD ITS SONG IN BATTLE?
OFTEN ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT WHEN ITS SONG IS SO SHRILL AND SUSTAINED THAT THERE BE WRAITHS TO KILL--
--AND WRAITHS A'PLENTY!
WITH A BLOODTHIRSTY EAGERNESS, BREAKER AGAIN BREAKS AWAY FROM THE OTHERS AND ADVANCES ON THE CITADEL.
THUS, HE IS THE FIRST TO REALIZE...
27


...THAT THE WRAITHS DON'T LEAVE THEIR FORTRESSES UNDEFENDED!
RISING FROM THE ROCK--THE BLAZING BRAZIER'S FIRE--THE WATER OF THE MOAT!
ELEMENTALS!
HUGE THEY ARE, AND MIGHTY! THEY BLOCK OUR PATH!
NOT UNAM'S PATH, FOR UNAM IS UNSEEN--
--HAVING MADE HIMSELF LOOK JUST LIKE HIS SURROUNDINGS!
UNAM! THE FOOL HAS SLIPPED PAST THE ELEMENTALS!
HE HASN'T THE POWER TO BRAVE WHATEVER PERILS LIE WITHIN, ALONE!
OR THE COURAGE, I WOULD WARRANT! I THINK HE HAS FLED, NOT FORGED AHEAD!
UNAM HAS PROVEN HIMSELF IN BATTLE, BREAKER--INFILTRATING ENEMY LINES WHERE NO ONE ELSE COULD!
BAH! A TRUE WARRIOR HAS NO PATIENCE FOR SPIES!
28

EACH CONTRIBUTES AS HE IS ABLE, BREAKER!
IT MAY BE SUBTLETY THAT WINS THIS DAY!
IF THERE IS AN END TO THIS MADNESS, SEEKER! WE THOUGHT WE COULD REST AFTER WRAITH-KIND'S ROUT!
THE PRIME DIRECTOR LIED, PULSAR! WE SHALL NEVER AGAIN KNOW REST--
--NOT SO LONG AS WRAITHKIND EXISTS!
BREAKER, HOW DID YOU EVER GET SO TRUSTING?
MEANWHILE...
TRAPPER, I AM NOT A FIGHTER...
NOR NEED YOU BE SKERA. THERE ARE OTHERS ENOUGH WHO ARE.
YOUR WOMAN REALIZES THE VALUE OF A WARRIOR, PULSAR! I FAIL TO SEE WHY SHE PREFERS YOU TO ME!
TRAPPER ADMIRES BRAVERY, BREAKER-- BUT ABHORS A BRAG-GART!
I NEED NOT BOAST IDLY PULSAR, WHEN MY POWER CAN DO--
--THIS!!
THE WATER ELEMENTAL-- IT SEETHES! IT BOILS!
BREAKER'S MICRO-WAVES ARE SUPERHEATING IT FROM WITHIN!
29

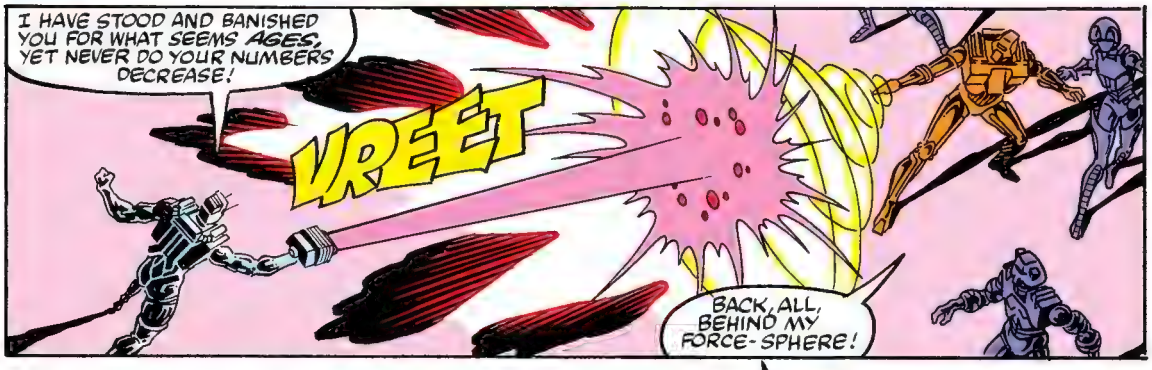

THE FOOL! WHERE A MOMENT AGO WE FACED BUT A WATERY MENACE-- NOW WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A SCALDING DEATH!
TRAPPER, WHAT CAN YOU DO?!
FIGHT WATER WITH FIRE, SKERA!
PREHENSILE CABLES SNAKE OUT.
THE FIRE DEMON IS THE FIRST TO BE ENMESHED.
NOW FOR YOUR WATERY TWIN!
YOU HAVE BOUND THEM BOTH VOLA!
AYE, SKERA--AND NOW I SHALL BRING BOTH TOGETHER!
SSSSSSSHH
30

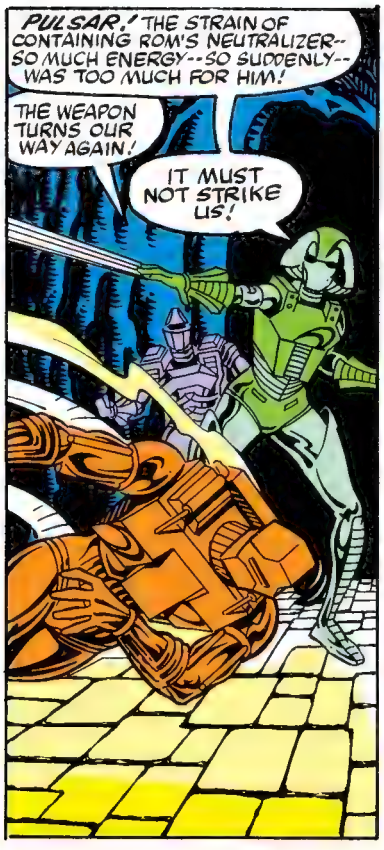

THE GUARDIANS AT THE GATE HAVE BEEN DEALT DEFEAT!
BUT HOW MANY MORE SHALL WE ENCOUNTER?
I DETECT... NONE TRAPPER.
NO DEFENSES? IS WRAITHKIND SO BADLY BEATEN THAT IT IS READY TO LAY DOWN AND DIE?
THAT I CANNOT BELIEVE, SEEKER.
TRUE, THERE IS A MYSTERY HERE, MOST EVIDENT IN THE FACT THAT SKERA DETECTS NO WRAITHSIGNS--
--BUT WHAT THE ANSWER TO IT IS I CANNOT EVEN BEGIN TO GUESS!
PERHAPS UNAM HAS ALREADY FOUND THE ANSWER, VOLA.
AYE... OR PERHAPS POOR UNAM HAS ALREADY FOUND--DEATH!
TRAPPER--THE GLOW!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER BEAM!
THERE MUST BE WRAITHS ABOUT, ELSE WHO DOES THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT BANISH?!
EAGER TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION, THE SPACEKNIGHTS SURGE FORWARD.
31

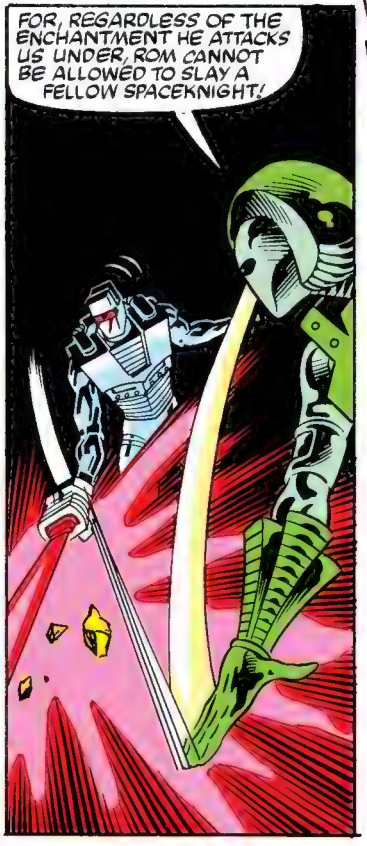
... ONLY TO BE CONFRONTED BY ANOTHER MYSTERY -- ONE FAR MORE DISTURBING THAN THE REST!
IT IS ROM!
HE DOES WIELD HIS NEUTRALIZER!
BUT AT WHAT?! THE ONLY DIRE WRAITHS IN EVIDENCE LIE IN ASHEN HEAPS AT THE SPACE-KNIGHT'S FEET!
32

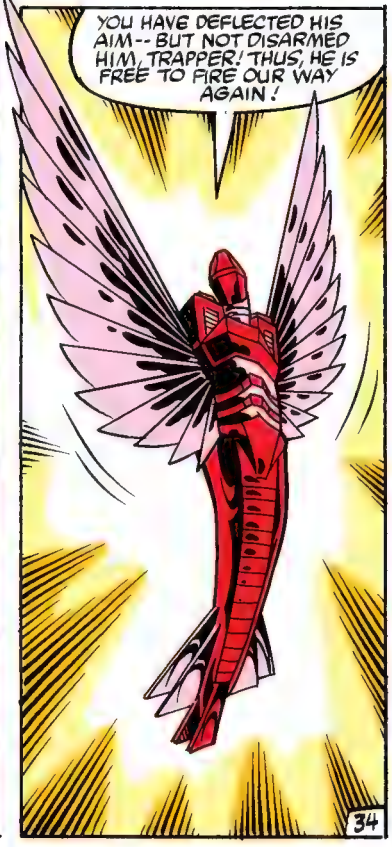
THEN ROM IS NOT THE GREAT SPACE-KNIGHT ALL SUPPOSE HIM TO BE--
--FOR 'TIS OBVIOUS THAT THE HORRORS OF WRAITHWORLD HAVE DRIVEN HIM MAD!
OBVIOUS ANSWERS ARE USUALLY THOSE MOST EASILY CHALLENGED, BREAKER.
UNAM!
SO! THE SLINKING SPY DID NOT DESERT US!
WHAT, THEN, HAVE YOU LEARNED, INVISIBLE ONE?
WHY DOES ROM FIGHT--WHEN THERE IS NO LIVING ENEMY IN SIGHT!?
"BECAUSE ROM SEES THE ENEMY," SAYS UNAM, "LISTEN! CAN YOU NOT HEAR HOW HE CRIES OUT?!"
BEG ME NOT FOR MERCY, WRAITH SCUM, FOR LIMBO IS VAST ENOUGH TO HOLD YOU ALL!
HE IS MAD!
NO! ENTRANCED!
I SUSPECT SO, SCANNER--AND THE SPELL MUST BE BROKEN...
... BUT WHO WOULD BE SO FOOLHARDY AS TO ADVANCE IN THE FACE OF ROM'S NEUTRALIZER!
SOMEONE HAS TO, TRAPPER, FOR ROM NOW PERCEIVES OUR PRESENCE!
BUT WHAT DOES HE PERCEIVE US AS?!?!
33

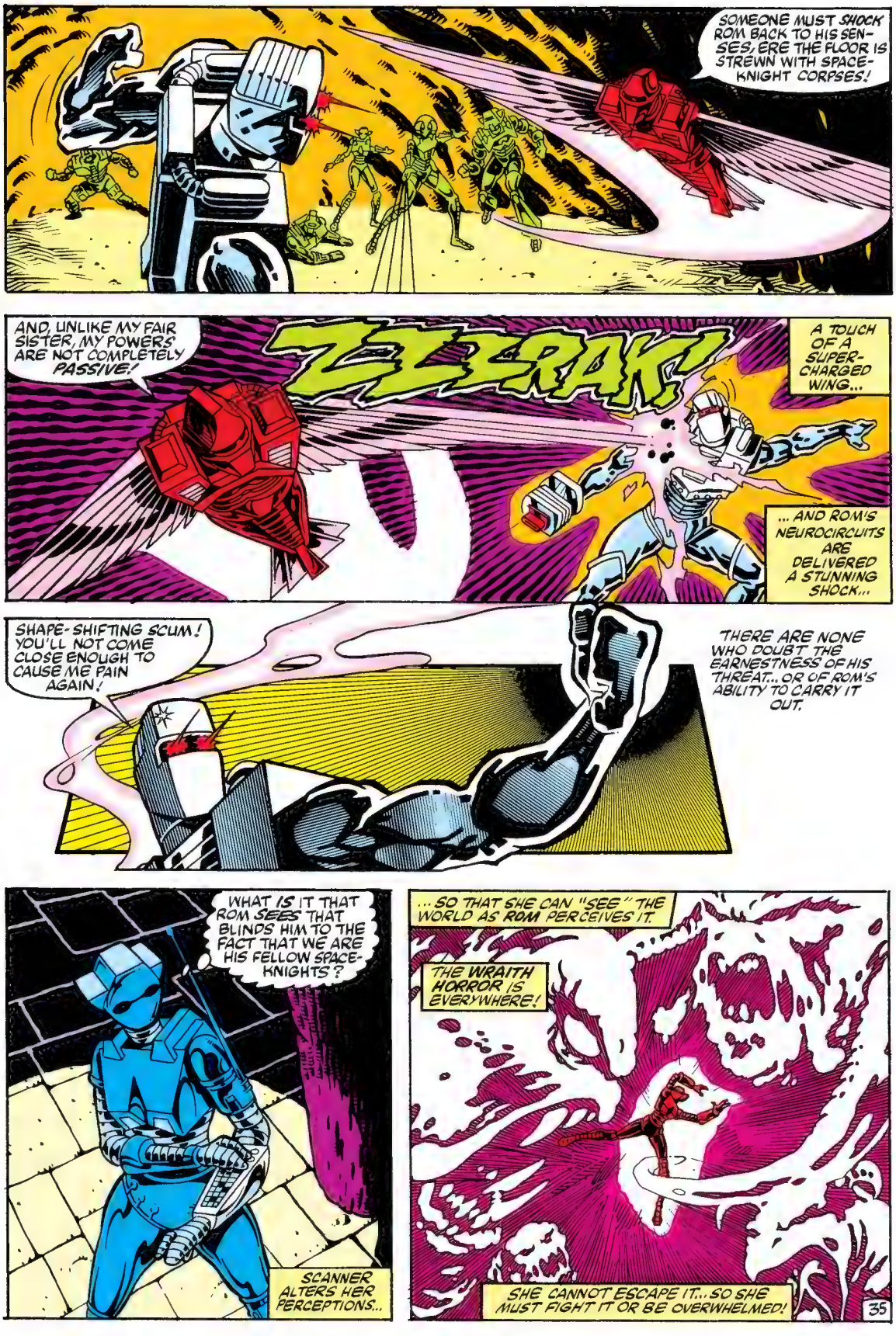
WRAITHS! MORE WRAITHS!
IS THERE NEVER AN END TO YOU?

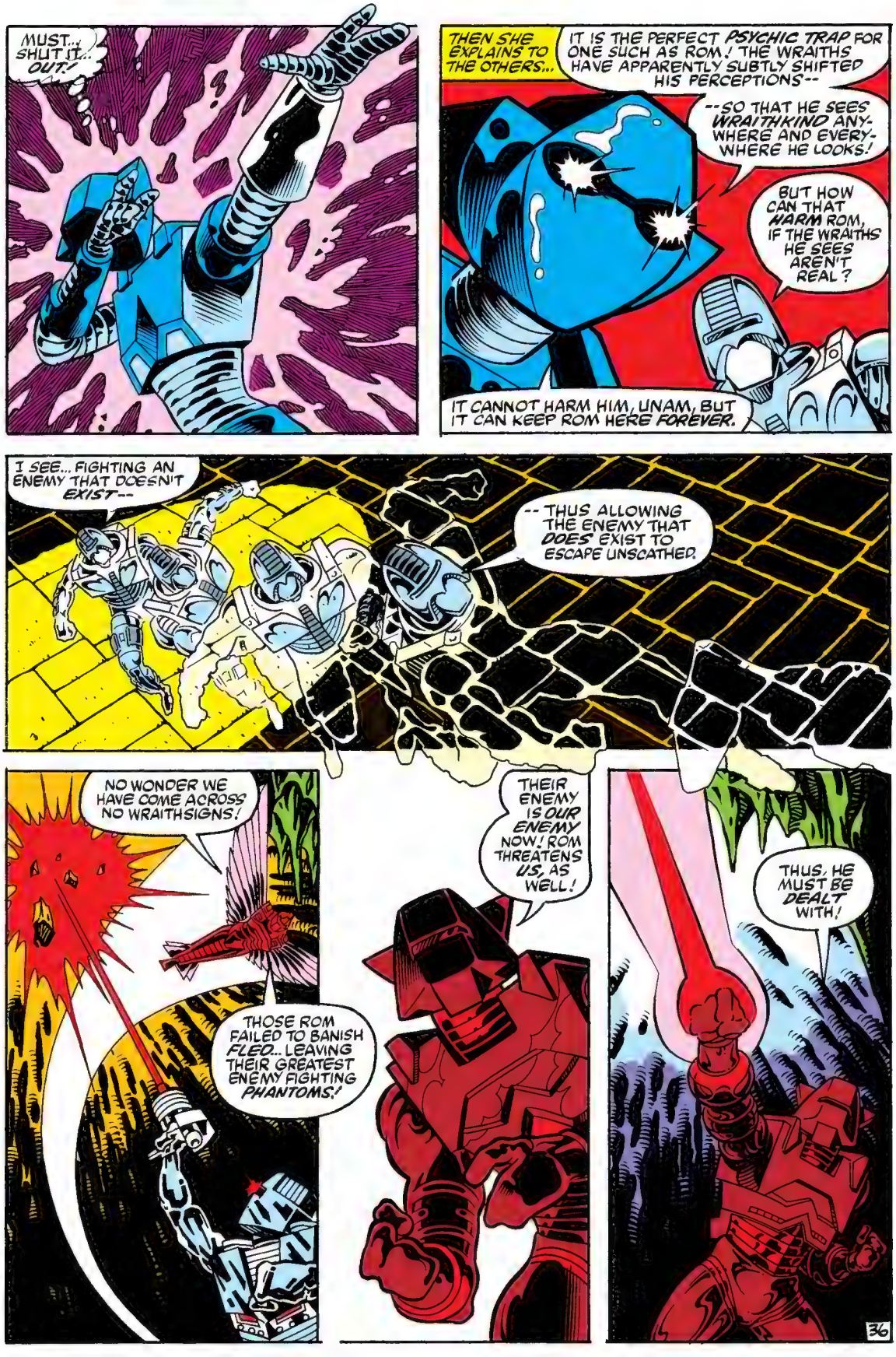

I HAVE STOOD AND BANISHED YOU FOR WHAT SEEMS AGES, YET NEVER DO YOUR NUMBERS DECREASE!
VREET
BACK, ALL, BEHIND MY FORCE-SPHERE!

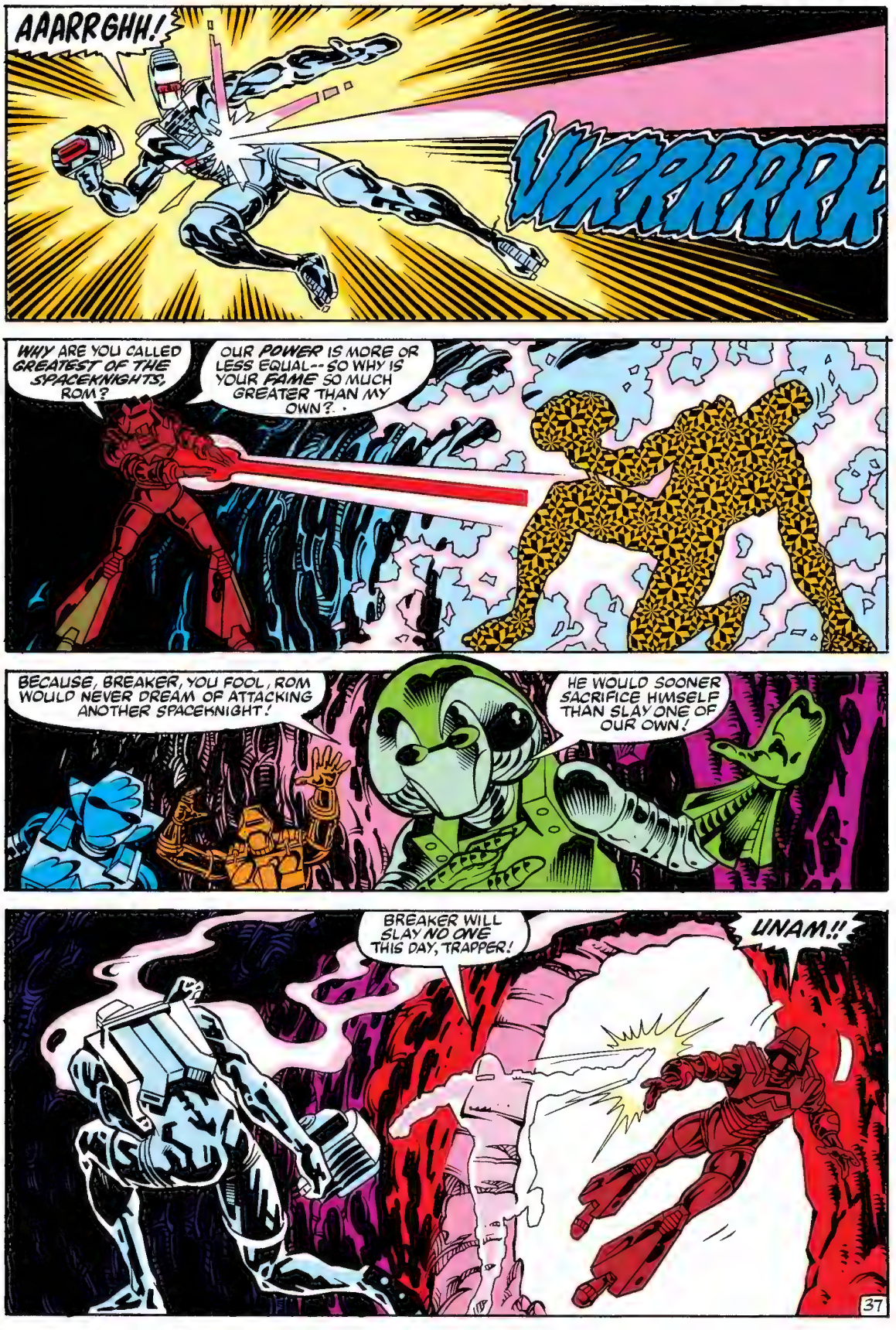

PULSAR,! THE STRAIN OF CONTAINING ROM'S NEUTRALIZER--SO MUCH ENERGY--SO SUDDENLY--WAS TOO MUCH FOR HIM!
THE WEAPON TURNS OUR WAY AGAIN!
IT MUST NOT STRIKE US!

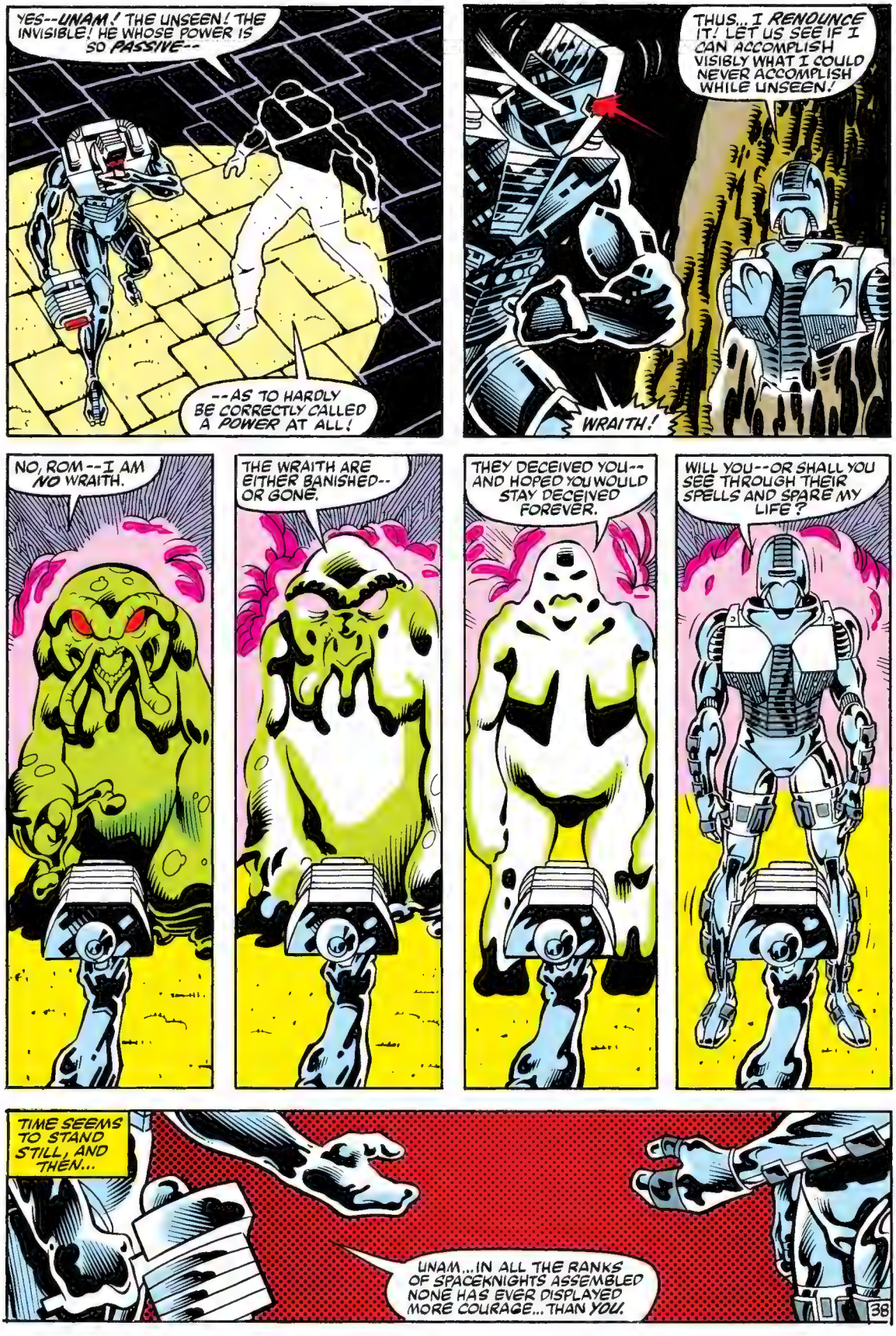

FOR, REGARDLESS OF THE ENCHANTMENT HE ATTACKS US UNDER, ROM CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO SLAY A FELLOW SPACEKNIGHT!

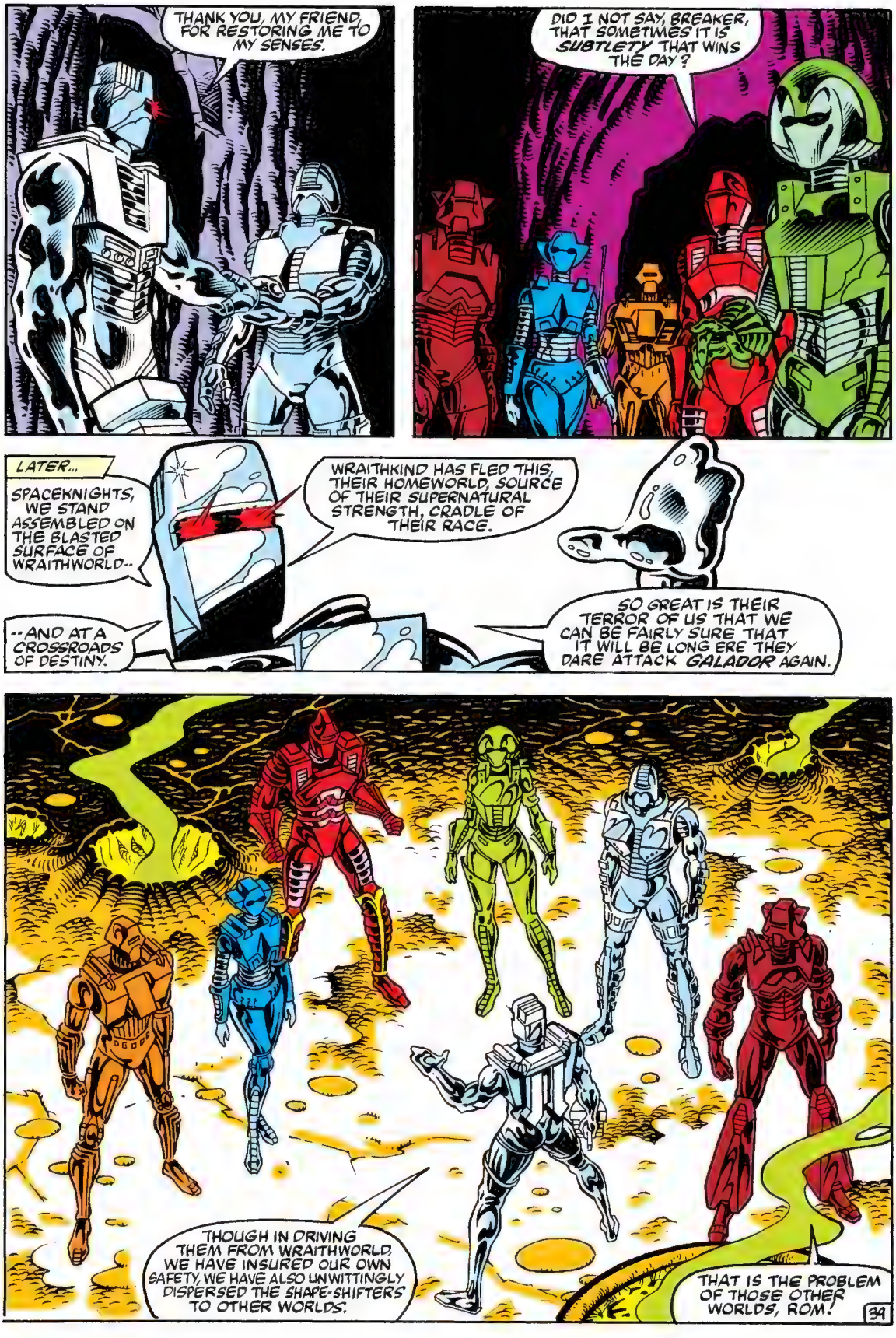

YOU HAVE DEFLECTED HIS AIM--BUT NOT DISARMED HIM, TRAPPER! THUS, HE IS FREE TO FIRE OUR WAY AGAIN!
34

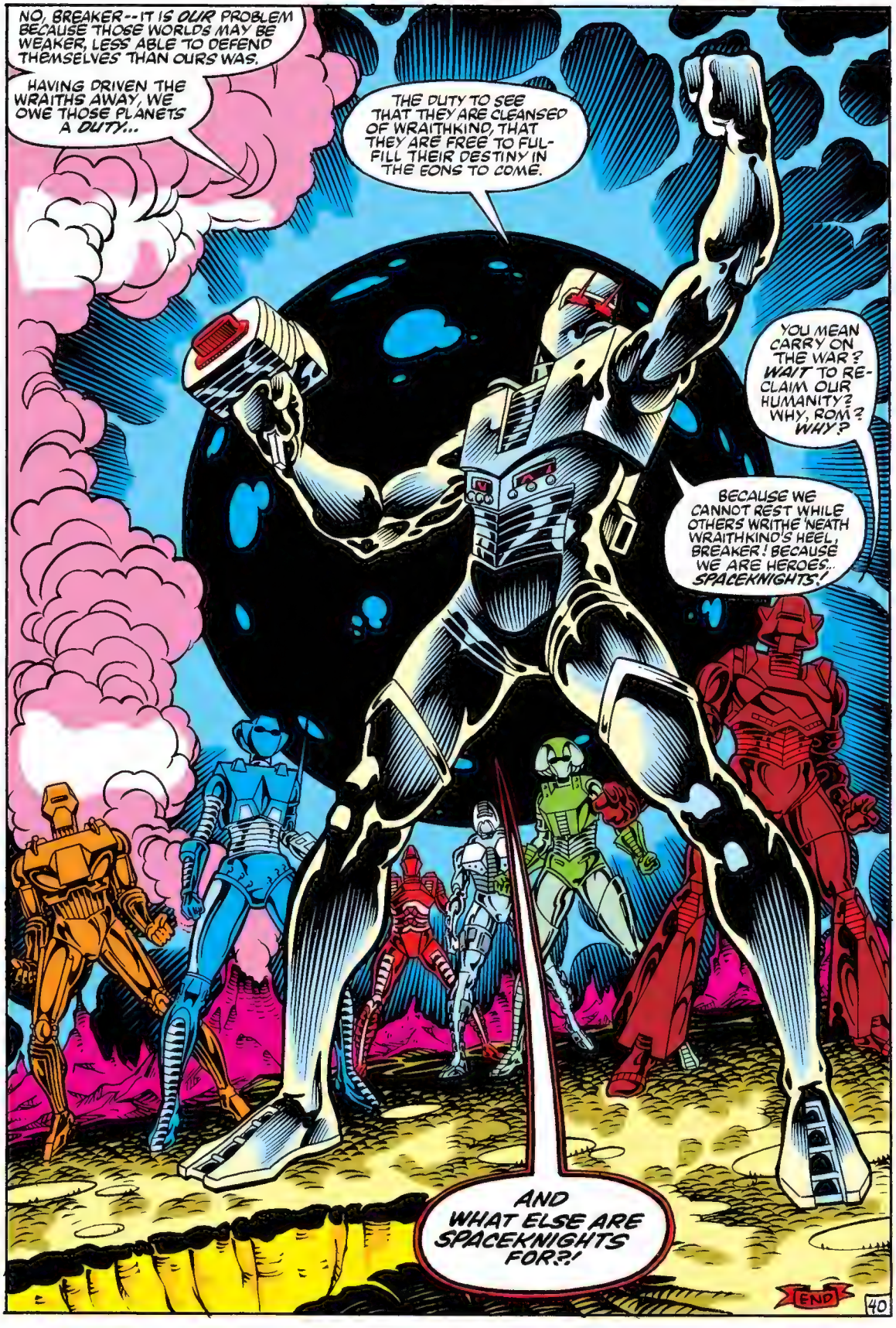

SOMEONE MUST SHOCK ROM BACK TO HIS SENSES, ERE THE FLOOR IS STREWN WITH SPACE-KNIGHT CORPSES!
AND, UNLIKE MY FAIR SISTER, MY POWERS ARE NOT COMPLETELY PASSIVE!
ZZ-RAK!
A TOUCH OF A SUPER-CHARGED WING...
... AND ROM'S NEUROCIRCUITS ARE DELIVERED A STUNNING SHOCK...
SHAPE-SHIFTING SCUM! YOU'LL NOT COME CLOSE ENOUGH TO CAUSE ME PAIN AGAIN!
THERE ARE NONE WHO DOUBT THE EARNESTNESS OF HIS THREAT... OR OF ROM'S ABILITY TO CARRY IT OUT.
WHAT IS IT THAT ROM SEES THAT BLINDS HIM TO THE FACT THAT WE ARE HIS FELLOW SPACE-KNIGHTS?
SCANNER ALTERS HER PERCEPTIONS...
... SO THAT SHE CAN "SEE" THE WORLD AS ROM PERCEIVES IT.
THE WRAITH HORROR IS EVERYWHERE!
SHE CANNOT ESCAPE IT... SO SHE MUST FIGHT IT OR BE OVERWHELMED!
35


MUST... SHUT IT... OUT!
THEN SHE EXPLAINS TO THE OTHERS...
IT IS THE PERFECT PSYCHIC TRAP FOR ONE SUCH AS ROM! THE WRAITHS HAVE APPARENTLY SUBTLY SHIFTED HIS PERCEPTIONS--
--SO THAT HE SEES WRAITHKIND ANY-WHERE AND EVERY-WHERE HE LOOKS!
BUT HOW CAN THAT HARM ROM, IF THE WRAITHS HE SEES AREN'T REAL?
IT CANNOT HARM HIM, UNAM, BUT IT CAN KEEP ROM HERE FOREVER.
I SEE... FIGHTING AN ENEMY THAT DOESN'T EXIST--
-- THUS ALLOWING THE ENEMY THAT DOES EXIST TO ESCAPE UNSCATHED.
NO WONDER WE HAVE COME ACROSS NO WRAITHSIGNS!
THOSE ROM FAILED TO BANISH FLED... LEAVING THEIR GREATEST ENEMY FIGHTING PHANTOMS!
THEIR ENEMY IS OUR ENEMY NOW! ROM THREATENS US, AS WELL!
THUS, HE MUST BE DEALT WITH!
36


AAARRGHH!
VRRRRRR
WHY ARE YOU CALLED GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS, ROM?
OUR POWER IS MORE OR LESS EQUAL-- SO WHY IS YOUR FAME SO MUCH GREATER THAN MY OWN?
BECAUSE, BREAKER, YOU FOOL, ROM WOULD NEVER DREAM OF ATTACKING ANOTHER SPACEKNIGHT!
HE WOULD SOONER SACRIFICE HIMSELF THAN SLAY ONE OF OUR OWN!
BREAKER WILL SLAY NO ONE THIS DAY, TRAPPER!
UNAM!!
37


YES--UNAM! THE UNSEEN! THE INVISIBLE! HE WHOSE POWER IS SO PASSIVE--
--AS TO HARDLY BE CORRECTLY CALLED A POWER AT ALL!
THUS... I RENOUNCE IT! LET US SEE IF I CAN ACCOMPLISH VISIBLY WHAT I COULD NEVER ACCOMPLISH WHILE UNSEEN!
WRAITH!
NO, ROM--I AM NO WRAITH.
THE WRAITH ARE EITHER BANISHED--OR GONE.
THEY DECEIVED YOU--AND HOPED YOU WOULD STAY DECEIVED FOREVER.
WILL YOU--OR SHALL YOU SEE THROUGH THEIR SPELLS AND SPARE MY LIFE?
TIME SEEMS TO STAND STILL, AND THEN...
UNAM...IN ALL THE RANKS OF SPACEKNIGHTS ASSEMBLED NONE HAS EVER DISPLAYED MORE COURAGE...THAN YOU.
38


THANK YOU, MY FRIEND, FOR RESTORING ME TO MY SENSES.
DID I NOT SAY, BREAKER, THAT SOMETIMES IT IS SUBTLETY THAT WINS THE DAY?
LATER...
SPACEKNIGHTS, WE STAND ASSEMBLED ON THE BLASTED SURFACE OF WRAITHWORLD--
--AND AT A CROSSROADS OF DESTINY.
WRAITHKIND HAS FLED THIS, THEIR HOMEWORLD, SOURCE OF THEIR SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH, CRADLE OF THEIR RACE.
SO GREAT IS THEIR TERROR OF US THAT WE CAN BE FAIRLY SURE THAT IT WILL BE LONG ERE THEY DARE ATTACK GALADOR AGAIN.
THOUGH IN DRIVING THEM FROM WRAITHWORLD, WE HAVE INSURED OUR OWN SAFETY, WE HAVE ALSO UNWITTINGLY DISPERSED THE SHAPE-SHIFTERS TO OTHER WORLDS.
THAT IS THE PROBLEM OF THOSE OTHER WORLDS, ROM!
39


NO, BREAKER--IT IS OUR PROBLEM BECAUSE THOSE WORLDS MAY BE WEAKER, LESS ABLE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES THAN OURS WAS.
HAVING DRIVEN THE WRAITHS AWAY, WE OWE THOSE PLANETS A DUTY...
THE DUTY TO SEE THAT THEY ARE CLEANSED OF WRAITHKIND, THAT THEY ARE FREE TO FULFILL THEIR DESTINY IN THE EONS TO COME.
YOU MEAN CARRY ON THE WAR? WAIT TO RECLAIM OUR HUMANITY? WHY, ROM? WHY?
BECAUSE WE CANNOT REST WHILE OTHERS WRITHE 'NEATH WRAITHKIND'S HEEL, BREAKER! BECAUSE WE ARE HEROES... SPACEKNIGHTS!
AND WHAT ELSE ARE SPACEKNIGHTS FOR?!
END
40

When we last visited Rom, he was newly returned to his adopted home after a sojourn to Galador, his home planet, and a short stint as the herald of Galactus. But his return to Earth was accompanied by a great loss—the Spaceknight Starshine was the latest casualty in the ongoing Wraith war. And as bad as that loss was, things were about to take a much darker turn for Rom and his allies.

As this second volume of the Spaceknight's classic adventures opens, Rom is reeling from the twin losses of his ally Starshine and of his own humanity on Galador. More isolated than ever, he fully recognizes the futility of his love for the Earth-born Brandy Clark.

After everything he's experienced since arriving on Earth, he needs a break—from Brandy, from the town of Clairton, West Virginia, from all the emotional moments he's experienced that have complicated his ability to remain a driven soldier in this war with the Dire Wraiths.

Which is where the stories in this second *Rom Omnibus* begin.

Writer Bill Mantlo and artist Sal Buscema never take it easy on the characters, forcing them to continually rediscover their heroics amidst great tragedy, and that theme continues in *Rom #30*, the first story in this volume.

Rom feels reasonably comfortable with the idea of the human adventurer, the Torpedo, one of the many side characters Mantlo plucked from across the panoply of the Marvel Universe throughout his time on this series, protecting Clairton in his absence. Rom even imbues Torpedo's visor with the same force as his Analyzer, allowing him to see through the Wraiths' human guises.

On his way out of town, Rom runs up against an even more obscure creation from Marvel's early years. Making his official return after a nearly two-decade absence from the Marvel Universe is the Metal Master. In the issue, "Silver Spiders in the Snow," Mantlo, Buscema and inker Joe Sinnott breathed new life into this long-forgotten villain (from the final issue of the Hulk's original six-issue run in the early 1960s). No powerhouse he, the Metal Master was originally beaten by the Hulk wielding a cardboard gun covered with silver paint before disappearing for nearly two decades. After a brief return in the out-of-continuity *Rampaging Hulk* magazine courtesy of writer Doug Moench and artist Walter Simonson, the Metal Master remained in the shadows until this issue. He didn't fare much better here than he did in *Incredible Hulk #6*, but the issue itself is important because it presages a more notable event (as viewed through the Torpedo's Rom-powered visor): the impending return of the fearsome villain Hybrid, last seen being blasted to Limbo in the pages of *Rom #18*.

Hybrid's previous appearance was in a landmark two-parter that guest-starred the X-Men. This time around, he would again face off against a mutant team, but one very different from the heroic X-Men—the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. The Brotherhood had been key players in two recent fan-favorite storylines: the X-Men's "Days of Future Past," and *Avengers Annual #10*, the issue that introduced their newest, youngest, and

most seemingly amoral character, Rogue.

At the time, Rogue was firmly established as an Evil Mutant. In her limited appearances, she had already permanently stripped Ms. Marvel of her abilities and memories, and showed a propensity for evil under the direction of the Brotherhood's leader, Mystique. But Rogue would come away from her experiences with Hybrid and Rom forever changed, and for the better.

Rogue's power allows her to absorb a person's abilities and persona for a limited time (except in the case of poor Carol Danvers). In the battle against Hybrid, this ability backfired, as his foul, inhuman thoughts made her recoil. But she attempted to do the same to Rom during the fight, making contact with his living armor with unexpected results. Powered by his suit, Rom didn't really have abilities for Rogue to acquire, but she did absorb his essence, his goodness. His *humanity*.

This set the character on a path of real, lasting change in ways that typically never happened away from a character's core title. But following this storyline, the character's co-creator, Chris Claremont, continued to move Rogue toward true redemption, returning her to the X-Men fold, only this time as a member of the team. Her journey toward redemption played out on in Claremont's X-titles, but it was here in *Rom #30* and *31* that she first experienced the goodness that set her on the path.

Following that two-part tale is the first-ever *Rom Annual*, by Mantlo but not Buscema. Here, the art team of Pat Broderick and Mike Gustovich help introduce a space-born character called Stardust. While Stardust has never been seen since, the story is a creepy tale that uses Rom's abilities in a unique way. Plus, as great as Buscema's work on the title was and is, it's always fun to see other artistic interpretations of Rom. Which happens a second time in the Annual's backup story by writer Steven Grant, and the art team of Greg LaRocque and Rick Magyar.

Following that story, once Rom leaves Clairton in *Rom #33*, everything changes. The series takes on an increasingly dark tone as Rom travels first to battle Wraiths at a remote manor in coastal Maine before plunging under the ocean in a two-parter guest-starring the Sub-Mariner, pitting them against perhaps the least-seen character that Mantlo ever brought into the series—the Seaweed Man from a mid-'60s issue of *Tales to Astonish*.

As the tone in these stories darkened, so too did the art. Joe Sinnott departed as series inker, his slick inking style giving way to the more rough-hewn and moody inks of the inking team of Ian Akin and Brian Garvey. The pair's crosshatch-heavy style and use of deep shadows perfectly fit this run of *Rom* issues. Mantlo's stories show an increasing reliance on the idea of black-magic-powered Wraith witches and warlocks, a contrast to the more science-based characters Rom had run up against so far. Both story and art reflected a growing unease in the series, heralding the even-more-foreboding times that lay ahead for Rom and his human compatriots.

The series' covers further emphasized the growing darkness Rom faced. The

covers, primarily by frequent *Rom* cover artist Al Milgrom, along with Bill Sienkiewicz, Ed Hannigan, Gene Day and Buscema himself (who drew his one and only *Rom* cover, issue #36) are filled with shadows and fog, blackened skies and horrific skeleton hordes.

Even more Wraith dark magic followed in a two-part story set in England and guest-starring a somber, mostly silent Shang-Chi.

At the same time, back home in Clairton, things weren't going so well in Rom's absence, either. Not for Brandy, anyway. Even while Rom lamented his loss of humanity, Brandy was experiencing the reverse—she wanted to be less than human, so she could fight at Rom's side. In a true "careful what you wish for" scenario, a Dire Wraith warlock disguised as a human who calls himself Doctor Dredd arrives on the scene to help give Brandy her heart's desire. Which of course has some *dire* strings attached.

It's in this period, a half year into their run as the artistic battery of the title, that the Buscema and Akin & Garvey team really hit their stride. In *Rom #41*, featuring guest stars Doctor Strange and the Living Tribunal, Buscema's layouts showcase some otherworldly dynamism, and Akin & Garvey's finishes provide all the magic and mystery that Mantlo's story necessitates.

At the same time, there's a "Gift of the Magi"-like turn for Rom and Brandy. Rom gets a chance, so he thinks, to mystically regain his humanity, and he takes it...just as Brandy sacrifices her own in order to be bonded to the Starshine armor courtesy of the nefarious Doctor Dredd.

From here, things get weirder. Now fighting side by side, Rom and Brandy run up against the likes of Quasimodo, the Gremlin and Devastator and the Soviet Super-Soldiers, among other odds and ends (the oddest being the magical, little-seen *Master of Kung Fu* character called Brynocki).

Grim tidings abound. For Rom and Brandy, yes, but even more so for the residents of Clairton, now without any Spaceknight to help protect them. Even with his powerful rocket-powered suit, the Torpedo proves no match when up against the horrific Dire Wraiths.

Rom #47 is where it all goes wrong, opening on a splash page of the sorcerous sister-Wraiths. Fans got their first glimpse at these terrifying, tentacled monstrosities in the promo mag *Marvel Age*, which debuted the new Wraith design courtesy of artist Walter Simonson. Their appearance on the cover of *Rom # 47* is equally creepy thanks to artist Bill Sienkiewicz's gorgeous image, but it's on the first few pages of the issue that the new Wraiths really demonstrate their menace.

Now sidelined are the puffy, relatively shapeless science-Wraiths, as they give way to these bulky, shambling monstrosities, complete with tentacles, ever-present drool off their insectoid mandibles and a snaking tongue with a drill-bit-like tip that burrows into humans' skulls, allowing the Wraiths to directly drain the life force from their victims. It's these Wraiths who descend on Clairton in Rom's absence.

Complicating the situation further as the series builds to its rather apocalyptic fiftieth issue is an appearance by the shape-shifting Skrulls. Readers who long

wondered about the existence of these two similarly powered alien races will get some resolution to that premise, but they may regret how it all plays out. The residents of Clairton, and indeed, Rom and Starshine, will never be the same. *Rom #50* remains a shocking turning point for the series, one that again drives home the point that this series is full of real, lasting consequences for its characters.

When the *Rom* comic began, it felt consequential thanks to Mantlo's willingness to permanently remove characters from the board if it drove the story forward, one of his real strengths as a storyteller. In *Rom #50*, Mantlo and Buscema up the ante on this approach, as well as serving up a grim reminder that this is a story about war, and in war, there are casualties, as much as we might wish otherwise.

The oversize issue also includes a portfolio of Rom-related images by an artist named Richard Konkle. Konkle would help conceive of the Spaceknight Squadron seen in *Rom Annual #2* as well as two characters in Mantlo and Buscema's *Incredible Hulk #275*: Jackdaw and Megalith. Outside of Marvel, he created the Conan the Barbarian parody *Equine the Uncivilized*. *Rom #50* ends with one nod to "Assistant Editors' Month" with the atonal-but-fun "Life with Rom and Brandy" single-page gag strip courtesy of writer/penciler Bob Harras and inker Terry Austin.

Where would the series go from here? That will remain to be seen until the third *Rom Omnibus*, since the final two issues in this book both take place prior to *Rom #50*.

Included here is Rom's rare appearance in the broader Marvel Universe, this time in the pages of the penultimate issue of *Marvel Two-in-One*. There, he and the Fantastic Four's the Thing face off against Wraith witches looking to re-animate the damaged armor of departed Spaceknight Firefall. The story is included here because it too was written by Bill Mantlo, and drawn by Bob Hall and Kevin Dzuban.

Finally, the second *Rom Annual* closes out this volume, courtesy of series regulars Mantlo, Buscema, and Akin & Garvey. In this extra-length tale set two hundred years prior to Rom's arrival on Earth, readers get a closer look at Wraithworld and are introduced to a new team of Spaceknights called the Spaceknight Squadron. This team takes the focus here, which sets up their appearance in the final year of the series. Until then, enjoy this gripping second volume of Rom's classic, often heartbreaking, tales.

Chris Ryall

Chris Ryall *is a comics writer, editor and publisher. He was the longtime chief creative officer and editor in chief at IDW Publishing, where he championed and co-wrote a Rom revival series in 2016. He also owns one of two official Rom helmets, courtesy of Marvel president Dan Buckley. He is currently the co-founder of Syzygy Publishing, as well as the author of Abrams ComicArts'* The Mighty Marvel Calendar Book: A Visual History *and writer/editor of Simon & Schuster's* Origins of Marvel Comics *re-release. Ryall lives in San Diego with his wife and daughter, along with a pacifistic cat and Wraith-hunting pug.*

WHEN *MARVEL AGE #7* MADE A TYPO IN AN ARTICLE, REFERRING TO ROM AS "RON," SO MANY FANS WROTE IN TO POINT OUT THE ERROR THAT *MARVEL AGE* WAS ABLE TO FILL AN ENTIRE LETTERS COLUMN ON THAT SUBJECT ALONE. THE FAN LETTERS RAN IN ISSUE #9, ALONG WITH A HUMOROUS PINUP (TAKEN FROM *ROM #3*) FEATURING THE SPACEKNIGHT'S REACTION TO THE ERROR.

LETTERS

Send your letters to:
MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE

Marvel Comics, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016

Dear **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE**,

I would like to point out an error in **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE** #7. On page 21 in an article on **THE X-MEN AND MICRONAUTS Limited Series** there is mention of the projects **Bill Mantlo** is scripting, and I quote "**SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, RON, HULK** and the **MICRONAUTS**."

May I question the title "**RON**." Is this a typographical error or misspelling of "**ROM**" or a new comic about the super hero antics of our president, clinging to walls vetoing bills?

Raymond Sheets
Route 7, Box 662
Ft. Pierce, FL 33451

Dear **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE**,

On page 21, of issue #7, it says that **Bill Mantlo** writes for the **SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, RON, HULK**, and **MICRONAUTS**. I'm waiting for my No-Prize.

Tim Taylor
1420 Meadow Manor
Beavercreek, OH 45385

Dear Jim and Mark,

In the Mutants and Micronauts article in issue #7, **Sandy Hausler** wrote that **Bill Mantlo** is scripting four titles, one of them being **RON**? I'm pretty sure that Sandy meant **ROM**. How about a No-Prize?

Robbie Busch
865 Butterfly Ct.
Cincinnati, OH 45231

Dear Marvel Agers,

I enjoy **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE** very much. The articles are very informative, and the Coming Attractions section tells me what to look forward to. Keep up the good work.

By the way, in issue #7, when you listed the titles that **Bill Mantlo** writes, you said he wrote **RON.** Shouldn't that be **ROM**? Do I get a No-Prize?

Mike Kerst
25 E. 46th St.
Indianapolis, IN 96205

Dear Jim and Mark,

I got a couple of things for you. Why don't you do a Limited Series on **Binary**? I really like what she's all about and how much she's changed. Could you do a Limited Series on **the Starjammers**, with or without **Scott Summers**? I'd also like to see a Limited Series featuring a battle between a super hero and a super villain, but done from the super villain's point of view.

Most important, though – in issue #7, page 21, it said that **Bill Mantlo** will be working on **SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN** and *who*? **RON**? Shouldn't that be **ROM**? Please mail my No-Prize quickly, because I've personally notified my mail carrier.

Darryl A. Nelson
427 N. Ridgeland
Oak Park, IL 60302

Dear **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE**,

On page 21 of issue #7, **ROM**, is spelled **RON**.

Chris Robinette
727 Martin St.
Hillsville, VA 24343

Dear **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE**,

I really like **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE**. It is interesting to read. I like the "Coming Attractions" section, because it helps me decide which comics I want.

There was only one problem with issue #7. On page 21, you said that **Bill Mantlo** would be writing **RON**. Shoudn't that have been **ROM**?

Chris Lloyd
Route 3, Box11
Mineral, VA 23117

Dear Marvel,

In **MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE** #7, page 21, you goofed! It says **RON**! It should be **ROM**! I want a No-Prize!

Andrew Dundass
759 Woodward Ave.
Milton, Ontario
Canada L9T 3T8

Aaarrrgh!

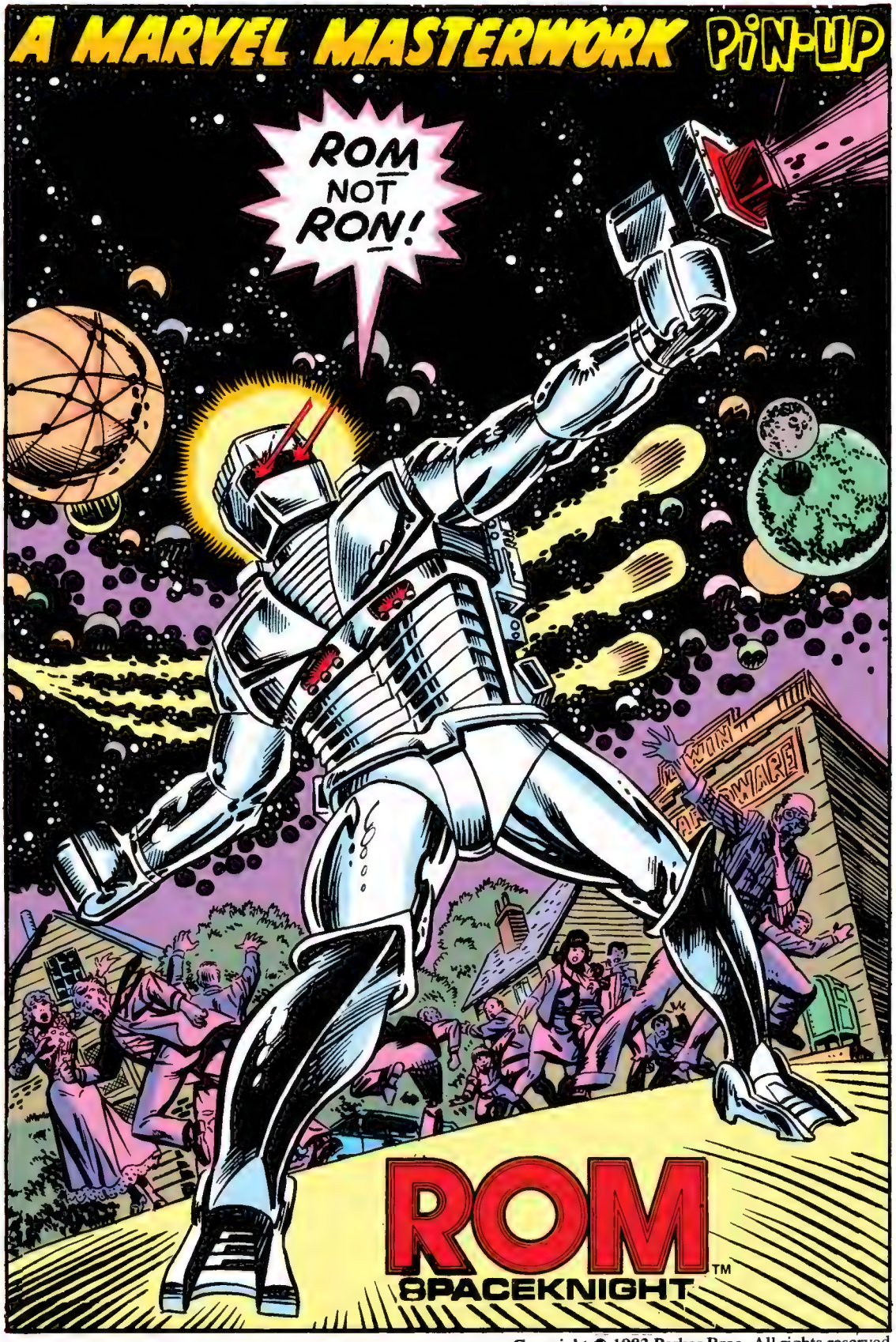
Way back when, at the dawn of the Marvel Age of Comics, *Stan Lee*, as a result of receiving numerous fan letters pointing out small lapses in the comics' continuity, had a very clever idea! It was called a *No-Prize!* Since Marvel wasn't holding a contest, it seemed odd to reward the letter writers with actual prizes. Besides, giving prizes would indicate that some Marvelites were winners, thus implying that others might be losers – and Stan strongly felt there shouldn't be any losers in Marveldom! The problem was solved by creating No-Prizes and everyone became a winner!

Perhaps Stan was a bit too subtle, though. Fans who were awarded No-Prizes on the letters pages began to write back complaining that they hadn't actually received their No-Prizes! Well, how could they? No-Prizes are non-existent, otherwise they'd be a prize. In an attempt to clear up the confusion, an envelope was designed containing the nebulous No-Prize. It was plainly marked: Congratulations! This envelope contains a genuine Marvel Comics NO-PRIZE which you have just won! Handle with care!

Would you believe the Bullpen then started receiving letters from puzzled No-Prize winners lamenting that they received the envelope but the elusive No-Prize was *missing!*

Matters worsened when unknowing editors complicated matters further by creating rules for this silly non-contest. Simple logic would dictate that there should be no-rules if the prize is just a No-Prize! Alas, Marvel is nothing if not confused!

But just to show you that we haven't lost our sense of humor, we're awarding everyone on this letters page a No-Prize! But if anyone really wants to get a No-Prize the hard way, tell us the name of the Marvelite who was awarded the very first No-Prize. But if any of you want to go the *real easy* route, we're sure you'll be able to find a spelling mistake in ths verry ishyou and we'll love ya just the same!



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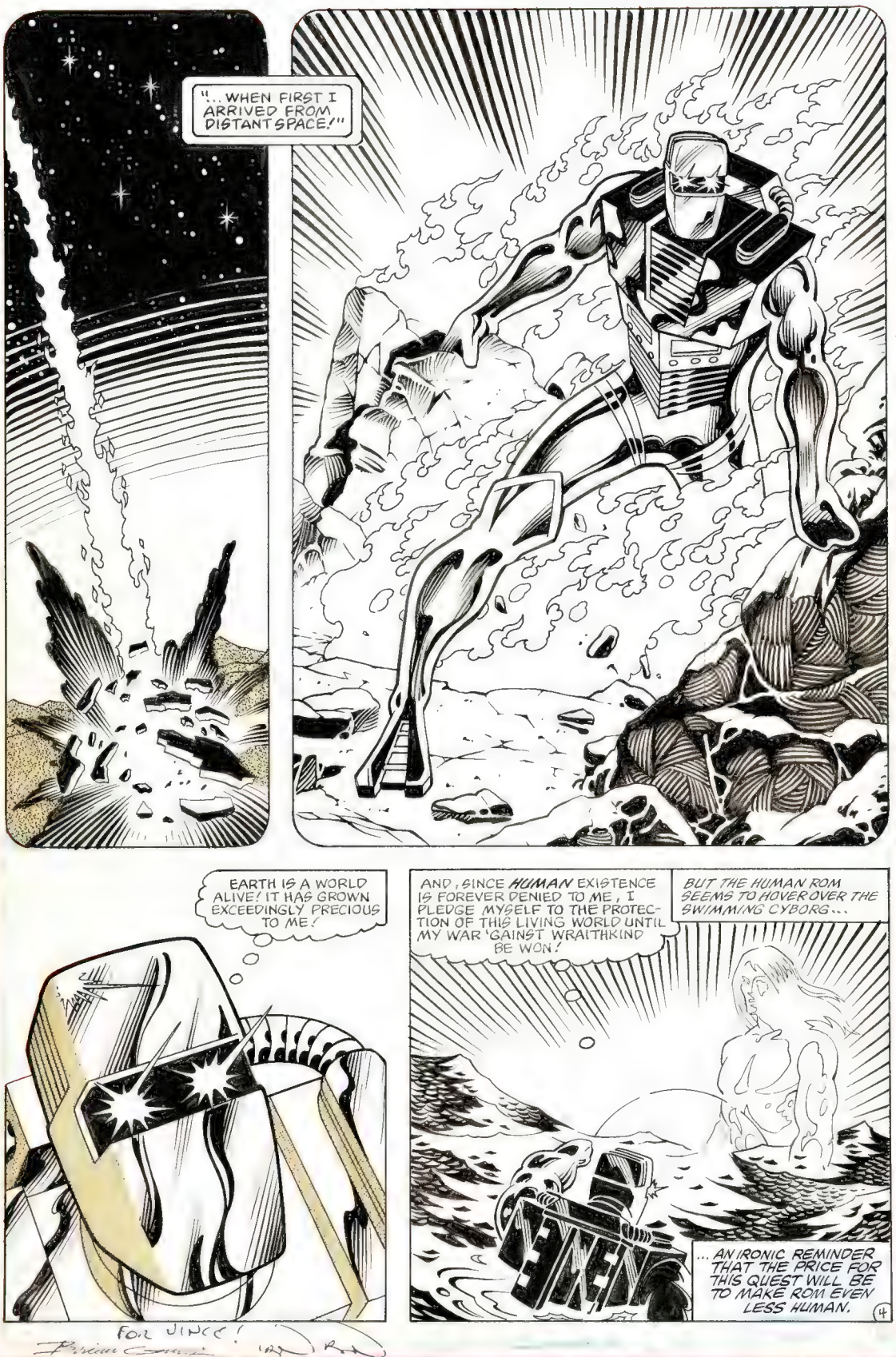
SUDDENLY, SYBIL AWAKES WITH A START...
ROM! THERE IS DANGER! THEY ARE HERE!
DANGER? WHAT IS IT, SYBIL? WHAT DO YOU SENSE?
WRAITHKIND--SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR! OH, ROM-- THEIR EVIL MAKES ME SHUDDER, AS IF THEIR DARKNESS WERE ABOUT TO DESCEND UPON ME AGAIN!
BANISH FEAR FROM YOUR HEART, CHILD OF EARTH. WE ARE FAR OUT OVER THE VAST WATERS, AND EVEN IF WRAITHKIND SHOULD FIND US HERE--
--THERE IS NO WAY THEY CAN HARM YOU WHILE YOU ARE IN THE CARE OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
SCARCELY ARE THE WORDS SPOKEN, WHEN...
RRRAAARGH!
ROM! LOOK!
SEA-SERPENT-- RISING SLIME-SOAKED FROM THE DEPTHS, BREATHING SCALDING FIRE!
I MUST SUMMON MY ENERGY ANALYZER--
--AND SEE WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE IT IS WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH!
WHY NOT JUST SUMMON YOUR NEUTRALIZER AND SLAY THE SERPENT BEFORE IT SLAYS US!
9

IT IS NO ILLUSION! YOU LIVE, SYBIL! THE SUB-MARINER HAS WROUGHT A MIRACLE!
NO, MERELY EXPLOITED ATLANTIS'S ADVANCED SCIENCE.
THE CHILD WAS DROWNING BECAUSE, UNLIKE WE ATLANTEANS, SHE COULD NOT BREATHE WATER!
THE RAYS EMITTED BY THE CONCH BED ALTERED HER GENETIC STRUCTURE SO THAT SHE NOW CAN.
SHE LIVES--FOREVER AN ATLANTEAN!
I WOULD IT WERE BY YOUR CHOICE, SYBIL!
IT IS A NECESSITY I EMBRACE GLADLY, ROM! THE WRAITHS SLEW MY FAMILY, STOLE MY CHILDHOOD!
PERHAPS HERE I CAN FIND A NEW FAMILY-- AND BEGIN RECREATING MY LIFE!
AYE, CHILD OF THE SURFACE WORLD--AND ALL ATLANTIS WILL LOVE YOU, FOR IT WAS YOU WHO WARNED OF DANGER IN TIME THAT IT MIGHT BE AVERTED--
--AND YOU WHO BROUGHT THE SUB-MARINER TOGETHER WITH... ROM!
22
NEXT MONTH: WRAITH MAGIC IN MERRY OLDE ENGLANDE! SCARECROW! DON'T MISS IT!

ROM #35, PAGE 22 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA & DANNY BULANADI
COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM


"... WHEN FIRST I ARRIVED FROM DISTANT SPACE!"
EARTH IS A WORLD ALIVE! IT HAS GROWN EXCEEDINGLY PRECIOUS TO ME!
AND, SINCE HUMAN EXISTENCE IS FOREVER DENIED TO ME, I PLEDGE MYSELF TO THE PROTECTION OF THIS LIVING WORLD UNTIL MY WAR 'GAINST WRAITHKIND BE WON!
BUT THE HUMAN ROM SEEMS TO HOVER OVER THE SWIMMING CYBORG...
... AN IRONIC REMINDER THAT THE PRICE FOR THIS QUEST WILL BE TO MAKE ROM EVEN LESS HUMAN.
4

ROM #36, PAGE 4 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY

COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

... BUT, AS FAST AS ROM FLIES, THE EARTH SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOUNG STEPHEN UP EVEN FASTER!
CAN YE NOT SAVE ME, MY SHININ' SPACEKNIGHT? ARE ALL THE LEGENDS MERE LEGENDS, AN' NOTHIN' MORE?
THE GROUND GAPES WIDE, A MYSTICAL MAW...
... AND THEN THE EARTH-CHILD AND HIS CAPTORS ARE GONE!
STEPHEN!
STEPHEN!
STEPHEN!!!
CLAWING AT THE EARTH WILL NOT LEAD YOU TO THE CHILD, ROM!
HE IS FAR AWAY--SPIRITED AWAY BY WRAITH MAGIC!
MAGIC THE LIKES OF WHICH WILL TRANSFORM THE BRAT INTO SOMETHING OTHER THAN HUMAN!
17

ROM #36, PAGE 17 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY
COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

PENETRATING THE VEILS BETWEEN DIMENSIONS, HOMING IN ON THE SOURCE OF THE SUPER-NATURAL STORM, THIS IS THE IMAGE DOCTOR STRANGE DISCOVERS!
EARTH AND THE BLACK SUN OF THE DREAD DARK NEBULA HAVE MOVED INTO COSMIC ALIGNMENT! THE MYSTIC MIGHT OF THE DIRE WRAITHS IS AT ITS PEAK!
THE WRAITHS HAVE USED THEIR SORCERY TO SUMMON THE OWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD TO EARTH!
I MUST PREVENT HIS COMING, OR MANKIND'S CHILDREN MAY BE LOST!
4

ROM #41, PAGE 4 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY
COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

ROM
9
A SIMPLE SPELL...
...AND DR. STRANGE IS GONE FROM HIS STUDY CHAMBER INTO A REALM OF UNREALITY!
THERE HE FINDS HE IS NOT ALONE!
GET THEE BACK, FOUL SPAWN OF DARKNESS!
VREET
'TIS THE SPACEKNIGHT--ROM! THEN STILL HE STANDS!
BUT HIS WEAPON--HIS NEUTRALIZER--HAS NO EFFECT ON THE DWELLER IN THE THRESHOLD!
THE SUPERNATURALLY SUMMONED HORROR COMES EVER NEARER TO THE MOMENT WHEN HE CAN STEP THROUGH THIS DIMENSION TO EARTH!
I MUST ADD MY SORCERY TO THE SPACEKNIGHT'S SCIENCE, AND PREVENT--
HOLD, DR. STRANGE! CAST NOT YOUR SPELL!
EH? WHO COMMANDS THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS??!
7

ROM #41, PAGE 7 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY

COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

ROM #42 COVER ART BY JOE JUSKO

ROM
44
QUASIMODO'S CAVE.
IT WAS NOT ALWAYS CALLED THUS. FOR A LONG WHILE, IN FACT, IT WAS SO SECRET THAT IT POSSESSED NO IDENTIFYING NAME.
GREAT EXPERIMENTS WERE CARRIED OUT HERE.
THOSE EXPERIMENTS FAILED, AND THOSE ENGAGED IN THEM PERISHED FROM THE EARTH.
A MONUMENT TO MAN'S ABILITY TO OVERREACH HIMSELF. THE SUBTERRANEAN COMPLEX STILL STANDS.
IT WAS HERE... THAT QUASIMODO... MADE ME HUMAN.
HE'S PAID FOR HIS DUPLICITY, ROM. I MADE HIM PAY.
BUT WHAT DO I DO TO SAVE YOU NOW?
THIS CLONED BODY... I OCCUPY... IS DECOMPOSING... DYING.
IF I AM TO CONTINUE... TO EXIST--
--MY REMAINING HUMANITY... STORED IN YON STASIS CUBE... MUST BE GRAFTED BACK... INTO MY SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR.
TH-THEN YOU'RE AS GOOD AS DEAD, MY LOVE, FOR I'VE NOT THE KNOWLEDGE OF A SCIENTIST OR THE SKILL OF A SURGEON!
OH, ROM-- I FEAR YOU ARE LOST!
NOT NECESSARILY, MY DEAR--

ROM #44, PAGE 6 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY

COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

"COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE SOVIET UNION!"
FROM THE GATES OF THE SNOW-SURROUNDED COMPLEX THE WHITE WOLVES RACE FORTH TO TRANSFORM, WITH BLOOD-CURDLING HOWLS, INTO PHANTOM FORMS... FORMS WITH WHICH ROM, SPACEKNIGHT IS ALL TOO FAMILIAR!
THEY ARE ALBINO HELLHOUNDS...
...AND THEY MEAN TO STAIN THE SNOWS RED WITH THE BLOOD OF HEROES!
NEXT MONTH
BESTIARY!

***ROM #45*, PAGE 22 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY**
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DEATHWINGS!
SOUL-STEALERS HATCHED IN FROZEN FIRE AT THE HEART OF WRAITHWORLD'S BLACK SUN.
THEIR TOUCH IS MORE FRIGID THAN THE NUMBING COLD OF SPACE ITSELF. ENVELOPED IN THEIR EBON WINGS, ROM FEELS HIS HUMANITY-GRAFTED INTO HIS SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR, CHILLED NEAR TO DEATH.
HE REACHES OUT TOWARDS THE DISTANT GLOW OF GALADOR'S GOLDEN SUN, SEEKING STRENGTH IN ITS WARMTH AS HE IS SWALLOWED IN ICY SHADOW.
THE DEATHWING NESTLINGS HAVE CONSUMED THE SPACEKNIGHT.
THE HATCHLINGS HAVE DONE--THROUGH SHEER STRENGTH OF NUMBERS--WHAT THEIR QUEEN MOTHER COULD NOT!
IT WAS OUR NEARNESS TO THE DARK NEBULA THAT GAVE THEM THE POWER!
COMMANDER!
WHAT IS IT, CLOD,--THAT YOU WOULD INTRUDE UPON OUR REJOICING?
THE DARKNESS OF THE DEATHWINGS GROWS LESS DEEP!
WHAT?! THEIR SHADOW IS ETERNAL--IMPENETRABLE!
5

ROM ANNUAL #2, PAGE 5 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY

COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

TO SAVE A SPACEKNIGHT
FEATURING THE SPACEKNIGHT SQUADRON CONCEIVED AND CREATED BY RICHARD KONKLE!
GALADOR!
I HAVE CALLED YOU ALL HERE TO THE COUNCIL TOWER, SPACEKNIGHTS, BECAUSE I AM SHAKEN UNTO MY SOUL!
HUSH! LET ALL GIVE HEED WHEN THE PRIME DIRECTOR OF GALADOR SPEAKS!
15

ROM ANNUAL #2, PAGE 15 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA, IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY
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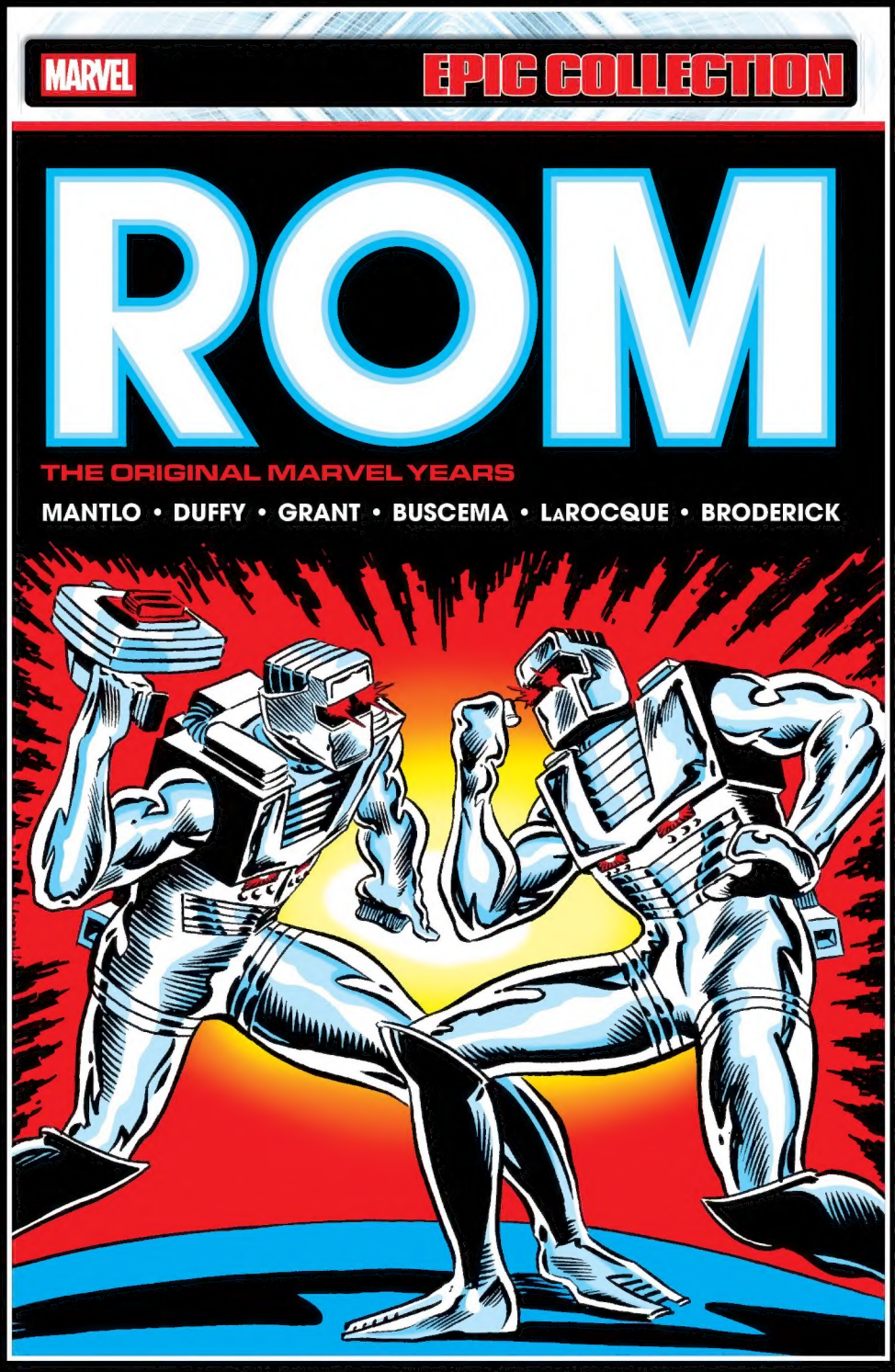
ROM EPIC COLLECTION: THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS VOL. 1 TPB
ISBN 978-1-302-96108-4



ROM EPIC COLLECTION: THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS VOL. 2 TPB
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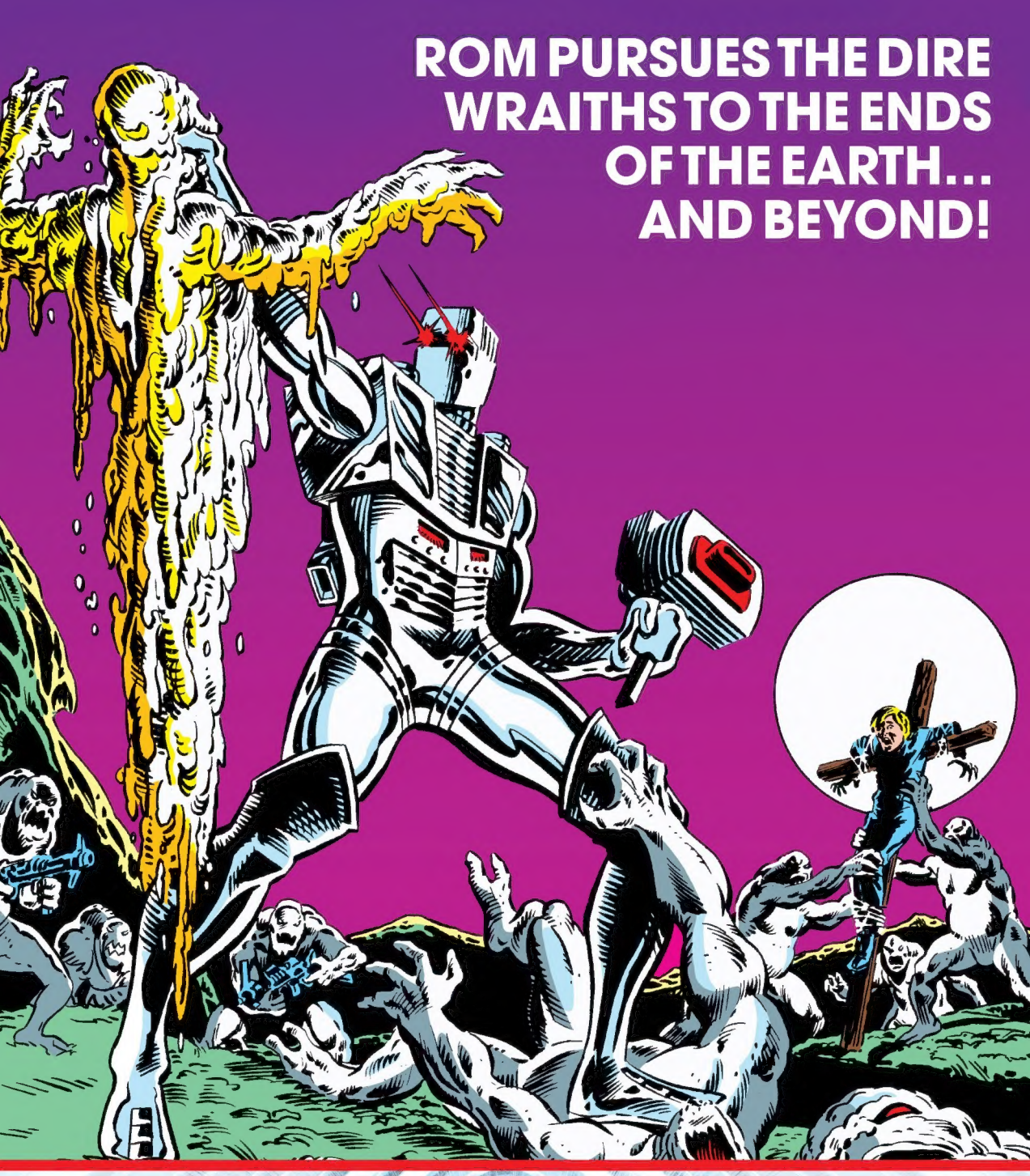

Rom's solemn quest to eradicate the Dire Wraiths from Earth brings him face-to-face with more of Marvel's greatest heroes! A journey to Namor's underwater realm leads Rom to an epic battle with monsters of the deep! Shang-Chi lends his deadly hands to thwart the Wraiths' black magic! Rom joins Doctor Strange in a mind-bending confrontation with the Living Tribunal! And as the Wraiths unleash their latest attack, the deadly Firefall might just be too hot to handle — even for Rom and the ever-lovin', blue-eyed Thing! Meanwhile, Rom is about to learn that when it comes to Dire Wraiths, the female of the species is deadlier than the male! And will Rom regain his long-lost humanity just as Brandy Clark loses her own?

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ROM #34-47 & ANNUAL #2 AND MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #99